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THE

UNHEEDING GOD

And Other Sermons

BY

THOMAS G. SELBY

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STUDENT FELLOWSHIP
R. P. I.

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I

THE UNHEEDING GOD

"And it shall come to pass at that time I will search Jerusalem with candles, and I will punish the men who are settled upon their lees ; that say in their hearts, The Lord will not do good, neither will He do evil."— ZEPH. i. 12.

THIS obscure prophet Zephaniah was probably a descendant of the great king Hezekiah, and delivered his message in the earlier years of Josiah, who had set himself to resuscitate and extend the work of his godly ancestor. Between these two beneficent reigns there came the degrading reactions in favour of idolatry associated with the names of Manasseh and Amon. True, there was a transient gleam of better things in the closing days of Manasseh, but his son was captured by the party of superstition and reverted to his father's earlier and baser policy. In the opening years of Josiah, this young prophet of princely blood found the rich and the prosperous either hostile or indifferent to reform. Little improvement had been effected by regents and counsellors during the minority of Josiah, and his personal assumption of power did not give promise of great and impressive results. There was widespread apathy and unresponsiveness, a temper which seemed to make the judgments

preached by Zephaniah inevitable. Even those who had a theoretical faith in the supremacy of Jehovah looked upon Him as of little practical account in history. This apathetic temper miserably disqualified both for worship and reform. Zephaniah, like others of his goodly fellowship, demanded not only formal allegiance to the authority of Jehovah, but a thousand loyalties of the secret and the solitary thought. Insidious tempers that God only could detect would be punished as surely and sharply as glaring misdemeanours and flagrant transgression. The stagnant life that bases itself on a theology of indifferentism, or justifies its own supineness by the whispered assumption that the righteous lawgiver of his people is a languid dilletante, a magnificent Laodicean, a somnolent potentate who is half-hearted in his care for the distinctions between right and wrong, must sooner or later be visited with the consuming wrath of God.

The text suggests three thoughts. The conditions under which this idea of a Laodicean God is evolved. The terms in which the Laodicean creed expresses itself. The judgment decreed for those who ascribe their own Laodicean tempers to the Most High.

I. The prophet reminds us of *the habit of life out of which this distorted view of the Divine character often grows—gross indolence.* This condition of character is described by an Eastern metaphor that has become one of the commonplaces of religious speech, "settled upon their lees." The figure brings before us one of the processes of the Jewish vintage. The fermented wine was poured back upon the thick sediment of the grapes from which it had been pressed, and in this way the wine gathered to itself greater strength. But

the process needed care and watchfulness, for if left upon the lees for an undue length of time, the wine became highly intoxicating and incurably harsh in flavour. It needed to be separated, by careful and repeated strainings, from the husk and sediment with which it had been mixed for a time.

The man whose soul has sunk into moral and religious stupor is just like that. In his daily life and consciousness the coarse and the fine, the earthy and the spiritual, the brutish and the God-like, lie mixed together in contiguous layers. There are the base deposits of animalism within the man, and not far off there are likewise elements of purity, reverence, and righteousness. In those who are godly and zealous for the things of God, an effectual separation between these opposing qualities has been brought about. The soul is no longer touched, inflamed, stupefied by the grossness of the blood. On the other hand, one who is careless of God and the things of God derives the dominating tone of his thought and life from the things that address the senses. He has abandoned himself to a world which stimulates his passion, blunts his intellectual powers, and confuses by its intoxications the discernments of his moral life. He lets the rank luxuries and delights of the passing age steal into his veins, and draws his chief satisfactions from that which is base and perishable. A man, of course, is compounded of flesh and blood, and there are legitimate needs that must be satisfied. He is providentially placed in social relations, and he may rightly feel pleasure in the warmth and sunshine of those relationships. But the type of man described in this Jewish metaphor, finds in mean and sensuous things the satisfactions that fix the qualities of his

personality. Without being in every case impure or dissolute, he pampers the animal nature which is at the roots of his life and becomes the victim of a turgid stupefaction that blunts his holier instincts and his finer apprehensions. No separating crisis has come to save the man from his dregs and his animalisms. The aroma of sanctity and all its promise and possibility have passed from the character.

These words imply that men of the inert and careless type are accustomed to make the pleasant monotony of their outward lives an occasion for encouraging themselves in apathetic tempers and traditions. In speaking of Moab, the prophet Jeremiah uses this same expressive simile, and applies it to the quiet and prosperity enjoyed by that half heathen principality as well as to the temper of religious stupor engendered by its geographical position and history: "Moab hath been at ease from his youth, and he hath been settled on his lees, and hath not been emptied from vessel to vessel, neither hath he gone into captivity; therefore his scent remained in him, and his taste is not changed." Under the influence of great religious enthusiasms it is conceivable that nations may resist the temptations of prosperity and cultivate alertness, simplicity, and spiritual fervour. But as a rule history reacts upon character, especially contemporary or recent history; and nations enjoying Moab's evenness of fortune often fall into Moab's temptation, and become somnolent and inert. Intellectual and moral life stagnates in the race that is cut off by some high dividing wall from surrounding nations. A government may possess an entire continent, or be in a position of such preponderating power that it has no fear of foreign aggression; it may have a navy that can outmatch

any combination of its rivals and make invasion impossible, and the temptation to materialism, luxury, and boastfulness will be strong. Generations have perhaps elapsed since armies met in mortal conflict upon its soil, and the most timid and imaginative inhabitant never dreams of the havoc that may be wrought by war. The decimating pestilences that swept through Eastern cities and the cities of mediæval Europe can never approach us. Our ports are watched against the inroads of disease, and our sanitation makes epidemics upon the old scale impossible. The famines that were the nightmares of the ancient world are impossible in the areas of civilisation. We have the highest possible securities for our temporal happiness and well-being. Our national habit tends to become more and more luxurious, self-contented, imperturbable. We build ourselves up in our sleek and well-insured respectability. Nations themselves play the rich fool, saying, "Soul, take thine ease." Every year we grow more like those of whom the Psalmist said, "Because they have no changes they fear not God." All such things tend to beget the temper of a lethargic materialism within us, and to favour our unconfessed belief that God is just as apathetic as ourselves.

That, of course, applies to the individual as well as to the nation. For some in our midst life is comparatively even, although as a rule Providence sooner or later provides us with many sharp antidotes to the coma which steals upon us. Few changes may have come since the first position in business was attained. The spell of prosperity has been long continued, and even when fluctuations in trade occur they occur in cycles, and can be foretold and arranged for. It is only at rare intervals that death creeps into

our homes. Life is genial and soul-satisfying, and we should like to keep things as they are for generations to come. We discountenance new movements because they might disturb the *régime* that has worked so smoothly in the past. This temper thrives in those districts which are sometimes described as villadom. Men settle down into a refined sensuousness that is fatal to stern conviction, keen consciousness of spiritual facts, and consuming zeal for righteousness. Whilst we must be careful lest we undervalue the religious earnestness of some elect souls to whom the lines fall in pleasant places beyond the borough boundaries, if we had a Hebrew prophet amongst us he would drop this old figure, and instead of speaking about people who are settled upon the lees, would describe the temper as suburbanism, taking religion as well as the other work and interest of life quietly. No wonder that the children of elegant and not entirely godless somnambulists should grow up apathetic and come to believe in an apathetic God, if indeed they hold to any figment of a God at all.

And this description applies too often to the man who was once religious after the best pattern. In the earlier stages of his history many things combined to keep him active, prayerful, strenuous. His life was one of struggle, sacrifice, hardness, disappointment. But smoother and more prosperous days came to him, and he met the temptation that deteriorated the best fibres in his character. He is nominally religious still, but a model Laodicean; no vices, but few outstanding virtues; never lifted up, never cast down, hard to move, slow to respond, disenchanted of his faith in all things save the few pleasures that lie ready to hand. The danger of this condition is great, and perhaps no surer

sign of it is to be found than in the change it makes in a man's view of God. A self-contented Laodicean is always under the temptation to believe that God must be more or less like himself, since he has ceased to feel any necessity to become like God. Apathy not only unfits for the best work which awaits us in our providential sphere of life, but it changes our conception of God into a half-articulate blasphemy.

II. *The prophet ventures to put into articulate speech this vague Laodicean creed of the heart.* "The Lord will not do good, neither will He do evil." Men sometimes hold contradictory and antagonistic creeds at one and the same period of their history, and the creed fenced in with whispered reserves is often the more significant and decisive of the two. It does not need the skilled investigator of psychic mysteries to prove that there is the germ of a double personality within us. Our religious consciousness now and again breaks up into streams that pursue separate courses, and never unite again into consistent oneness. There is a sceptic and a believer, a pagan and a theist in most of us, and a depraved will sometimes imposes itself on a sound and healthy creed. All that is a part of the dualism of human nature. Those supine and well-to-do citizens of Jerusalem denounced by the prophet, may have had reserves of orthodoxy and of pious patriotism behind their time-serving expediency and supineness. They probably held fast to such portions of the Pentateuch as they possessed, and were tenacious of many of the rites based upon its teaching. But the blessings and the curses of the law, said they, had little or no relevance to contemporary life. No hope was stirred within them when the prophet saw in the blessings of the

law the earnest of millennial peace and happiness, and no fear was awakened when he made the curses of the law the text for his message of judgment. That old code had become a dead letter. Inspired admonitions were visionary, threatenings of wrath and tribulation the unhappy dreams of the discontented. God does not interfere even for the nation supposed to be under His special protection. He lets Hezekiah and Manasseh, Amon and Josiah, do as they like, and neither frowns nor smiles upon the national fortunes. The pains and pleasures of human life have no fine correspondence to character. Good and evil befall men without any specific relation to the kind of lives they live. The fortunes of kings, dynasties, races, unfold themselves from generation to generation irrespective of all moral factors. It is not easy to see any sign of God's judicial dealings with the children of men. Such things they said in their confidential intercourse with each other or in converse with their own hearts. Whatever the Sabbath creed might be, the maxim of the weekday life was—"The Lord will not do good, neither will He do evil." He was just as slow to respond to moral issues as the most cold-blooded and imperturbable of themselves.

We need not stay to discuss the question whether it is the habit of life or a dishonouring idea of God against which the prophet threatens sharp and discerning penalty. The two things are inseparable. The correlation is as vital as the beat of the heart and the intake of the lungs. A careless life always fosters an irreverent creed, and an irreverent creed is formulated as excuse or sanction for a careless and self-indulgent life, and makes the carnal sleep doubly sound. It is something in the character which is to be punished, but

a vice which shows itself in twofold form, disabling from all reforming enterprise on the one hand, and turning the creed into a blasphemy on the other. The wickedness of a supine and self-indulgent temper culminates when it engenders a base conception of the Most High. There is a measure of truth in the maxim of the scoffing Frenchman, that "man makes God in his own image," and this is one of the cases in which the maxim aptly applies. Sometimes a man may make God in the image of an ideal that is far loftier than anything to be found in his own character, but in the case of the man who is "settled upon his lees," such ideals are extinct. It is not possible for that man to do otherwise. If God fail to draw our hope, worship, and struggle up towards His own life of unselfishness and spirituality, we shall soon drag down the idea of God to our own gross and stagnant level. We cannot be tepid in our moral sensibilities without making God tepid also. The moral indifference so commonly attributed by our own century to God, is the shadow cast by the self-indulgence and cold-blooded lethargy of all classes of society, especially the prosperous. The strenuous man will believe in a strenuous God, and will turn atheist if asked to do homage to an Olympian dilletante who lounges on a couch of ivory with cupbearers at his side. This indolently amiable God we all worship to-day, so much like the God of the apostate Jews of Zephaniah's time, this Deity who impersonates upon an enormous scale the easy-going ways of a man about town, this languorous clubland magnate is as much an idolatrous fabrication as Dagon, Ganesha, or Mumbo Jumbo. It is perhaps a more insulting thing to make God a Laodicean like ourselves than to think of Him as a fiction of the

imagination. A denial of His existence may be better than wholesale misrepresentation. He is a mammoth mechanism without a soul forsooth, a portentous force driving the firmamental merry-go-rounds, supreme in the natural order, but of an aborted moral life. Can a graver impeachment be levelled against Him than that? And the worst of it is that this moral callousness is the interpretation we put upon His transcendent patience and long-suffering. If God seems slow to act, it is because He is waiting for our repentance.

A Chinese philosopher who lived many centuries ago asserts in one of his books that the Supreme Ruler of the universe is pure and intelligent, but without affections. In common with his race he admits that retributive processes are at work, but assumes they are passionless, automatic, impersonal. Those processes, however, do not express intense zeal for righteousness, holy solicitude for the uplifting of the nations, burning sensibility to moral issues in the heart of the Divine consciousness itself. And the people put the same thing in homelier and more familiar form: "The gods are amiable and easy-going, and won't concern themselves with us even if we do wrong." We can find echoes of the Chinese philosopher in some of the literature of our own time. Mr. Herbert Spencer explains life by the presence of an inscrutable and ever-persisting force. He is willing to attribute intelligence to that mysterious force, but halts when asked to clothe it with moral affections and sensibilities. In a modernised form he allows the argument for a first cause, and then denies that cause living, effectual play in the events of human history. Natural law is so widespread and inexorable that there is no room for moral interpositions. We

can understand a being who never concerns himself with human affairs because of the limitations of his intelligence, but to concede intelligence and deny the will or the capacity for moral interest in human affairs, looks like an insult of supreme shamefulness. We refuse to the Being behind and above and within the universe that which is greatest and most honourable in ourselves. But the question cannot be treated as one of abstract philosophy only. The temptation will be strong to live out this postulate with a consistency worthy of a better cause. We accept the broad dogma of a God, for the universe would be too much of a tangle without that, and then make His sway theoretical, secretly questioning whether He cares to exercise retributive power over the realms subject to His sway. That compromise is necessary to our mental comfort. Our lives of carelessness rest upon the assumption that God does not trouble Himself about what we are thinking and doing. He is a mere dabbling doctrinaire, a mincing amateur on moral interests, who, if He touches them at all, touches them lightly as a pastime. We are orthodox in lip, posture, and outward countenance, or at least wish to pass as such, but deep down in the mazes of our formless cogitations there is this faint whisper: "The Lord will not do good, neither will He do evil." Let us not be such sons of Belial, and make out of our lukewarmness a theology buttressed by specious science.

It is often said that in comparison with the universe *man is such an insignificant atom, that even assuming the existence of a God, it would not be worth God's while either to reward or punish him.* The Tzar or the Kaiser might as well appoint trained magistrates to judge the clouds of summer midges, or

found a supreme court to draw the dividing lines between right and wrong for the minute life of the pond. He who supposes that God will be solicitous for his spiritual training has no sense of that huge scheme of things in which man plays such a humble part. In an article on the influence of Darwin, published some years ago, Mr. Grant Allen says : " To the older creeds man was the central fact of the universe. They tacitly regarded him as the main concern of its ruler in whose image they declared him to have been originally fashioned. For him the earth and all that was in it had been at first created. The very sun and stars had reference mainly to his service and wants. Darwinianism rudely upset at one sweeping blow that complacent philosophy of a petty, insignificant species. It showed us man as one amongst the numerous mammalians, begotten by solar energy on the surface of a third-rate satellite to a second-rate sun. And this change in our belief as to man's place in nature involved of necessity endless modifications in our views as to our own character and destiny."

That thought, which is the foundation text of the entire philosophy of materialism, was strikingly expressed by the late Poet Laureate. He speaks of human history with its pathos and struggle, its tragedy and its tiny progress, as " a struggle of ants in the gleam of a million million of suns." Those who use the phrase without Tennyson's unclouded faith, assume that the ant is nowhere in such a trackless sea of light and in comparison with the fountain orbs that feed the sea.

Is it too much to say that the least thing in the world of animate is greater than the sum of all

things in the world of inanimate life? The ant, after all, is more wonderful than the sun with its unfathomable marvel of brightness. Mere magnitude cannot become a true standard of value for the estimate of that which is moral and intellectual. Most of us have come to learn that there is an arithmetic which deals with quality as well as quantity, and it is perhaps the more important of the two. One might as well say that the desert, which can scarcely command a market at a shilling the square mile, is a more precious thing than the little pebble buried in its sands, for which crowned heads compete. Macaulay's Polynesian would probably assert that the stock of a Manchester calico warehouse is of greater value than the contents of the National Gallery, because the pieces measure so much more, but we know he would be absurdly wrong. It is the image put upon the woven texture which gives it value. The cunning ant may be greater than the clumsy dinotherium of the primeval swamps. Ask a mother if superficial area has any relation whatever to the thought and love she gives her child. According to Mr. Grant Allen's principle the showman's child in its one-roomed house on wheels has some little chance of being thought about, but the princess, whose misfortune it is to live in a castle with many corridors and a hundred rooms, is sure to be neglected and forlorn. Every extension of the empire, forsooth, must abridge the capacity of the queen to care for her own children, and unfit her to cherish the sentiments which enrich and adorn the home.

In His infinite wisdom and resourcefulness God may, after all, have a little thought to spare for the

trouble of ants. It is no concern of mine if one ant carries off a crystal of sugar belonging to another, or fights his neighbour and dislodges him from the nest, or indeed if the food supplies of a whole tribe of ants are destroyed. I have barely time, thought, capacity enough for ministry to those who are of the same flesh and blood with me, and cannot enter into the interests of another kingdom of life without neglecting those of my own. If I had an infinite capacity like God's it might be a crime for me to pass by unheeded the trouble of ants. There is a power and possibility of feeling in God to which no conceivable term can be put. He does care even for ants, and has shown that by bestowing upon them a wonderful talent for caring for themselves and their kind. If it is His to kindle the splendours of a million million of suns, He can still think about me as much as if I were the one solitary pilgrim through the immensity of His uncounted orbs. He does think about me, and it is rank blasphemy to say He cares about every side of my nature but its moral side. History teems with the rewards and punishments He never fails to administer for our encouragement and warning. If His kingship is living, competent, righteous, it is impossible He should forget His duties to those whom He governs. In the supreme conflict between truth and falsehood, good and evil, which is being waged in the midst of the nations He cannot be neutral, and like one of the Homeric heroes, indulge Himself in a policy of inaction.

If we accept the message of modern science, *evolution itself in its higher ethical stages is a sufficient refutation of this Laodicean travesty of God.* We are told that the so-called sense of right and wrong has

been slowly awakened within men, and that it has its primitive roots in an elementary susceptibility to pleasure and pain. That theory implies that through the untold cycles of the past, retributive activities have been playing upon the sense of pleasure and pain, till at last, when the animal emerged into the human, this complex and marvellous faculty appeared. By the accumulated teaching of these successive and innumerable judgment days, the thought of the race became so trained and disciplined, that it instinctively linked wrong with loss, and right with gain. For ages upon ages some unseen power has been patiently reading into the consciousness of mankind the blessings and curses of the law, and enforcing the message with lavish bounty on the one hand and strokes of the rod on the other, till at last mind-stuff quivered into the Divine thing we call conscience. That looks as though God had intervened in the past, times without number, and as though His righteousness were always unresting in asserting itself. Wonderful epochs of active retribution are necessary to a change of that type, epochs vast as any required to work out the problems of biological change. It suggests the persistence of the Divine righteousness which asserts itself in reward and punishment, for the principle of retribution must have been dominant through the epochs given up to the lowest types of life, and only came into complete play when the culmination had been reached in man. But it did assert itself at last, and that most effectually. And does not the analogy of the past suggest that the law may yet awake into higher and more potent forms? And when we pass from biological fact to the records of human history can we not see

signs of the interposing hand of a mighty and unseen judge? Let us be honest with ourselves, for there can be no two sides to this question, otherwise man would not have evolved into the moral and responsible being we find him. It is a perversion of the real message of science if we find in it any kind of sanction for apathy, and for that supine God who is but the shadow of our own miserable lethargy.

The analogies of our imperfectly ordered social life often give some kind of colour to these false and insulting estimates of God and His ways. It is said that the passing age has been one of exaggerated individualism. Men have been so much occupied in asserting the sacredness of the individual and his separate rights, that they have forgotten the responsibilities of each member of the community to the organic whole. There are prosperous people around us who will not touch public work of any kind. They repudiate the duties of citizenship. Municipal administration may sometimes involve worry, unpleasantness, strife, and they are content to see local affairs in hands that are clumsy or unclean. They are unwilling to take any active part in politics, even when moral issues are at stake. Party feeling runs high, and victory now and again falls to the coarse and unscrupulous man. "They will not do good, neither will they do evil." These quiet, retiring, well-conducted people command our respect. Perhaps they are not heroic, but we do not brand as wickedness their distaste for vulgar strife. It may be the day is coming when we shall. It seems a little matter, because power is subdivided into insignificant morsels and critical occasions are not immediately at hand. The abstention of a solitary unit cannot

make much difference. Of course we should have thought it a crime if one of the absolute rulers of the old-world *régime* had yielded the reins of his government to an adventurer, and the fields and homes of his people to greedy and invading aliens. For those in authority over us to pursue a policy of masterly inaction in times of national peril and demoralisation, would be a capital crime, and can it be accounted less shameful in Him whom we assume to be King of kings and Lord of lords? A man may sometimes excuse himself from taking part in public affairs, because he trusts the aggregate good sense and virtue of his fellow-citizens, and assumes things will not go very far wrong. But God cannot abstain from intervening in human history on the ground that the course of affairs will move on in the same way, whether He come upon the scene or not. If God is indeed the indifferentist represented by this evil whisper the world is sure to go disastrously wrong. All the passions cradled in its breast drag it towards chaos and misery, not to speak of an unseen spirit of evil which works from age to age. "Neither to do good nor to do evil" is a covert surrender to the powers of diabolism.

The growing temper of brotherhood, bound to prevail in the no very distant future, will classify as miscreant the man who, in his refined selfishness, abstains from all part in questions that concern the common welfare. "The people have no claim upon me; I have no obligation to the community in whose midst I dwell other than that of keeping the law." The day will come when no one will be found shameless enough to utter that plea. If the sanctity of the home were at stake, and of the countless

homes which form our fatherland, the least public-spirited voter amongst us would not venture thus to justify his abstention from public affairs. A man must sometimes intervene for the sake of his children and his children's children. We loathe the wretch for whose arrest the Poor Guardians offer a reward because he has deserted his family, and that kind of man as well as the man brought to book by the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children is punished. The name of one writer in our own century has found its way to the roll of fame who abandoned his children to the care of others, and gave himself up to desultory literature, varied with opium-eating. We condemn that with one consent. God would be just as guilty and shameless if He were to show no concern for our moral discipline and upbringing, and abstain from all interposition in our lives; and His greatness would aggravate and not excuse the misdemeanour. Surely He is not the kind of character for whom the Poor Guardians advertise. He is not a magnificent De Quincey, careless of those who in their greatest and holiest possibilities are His offspring. God takes pleasure in the small equities that are apt to elude our notice, for those equities are a sign of character. "A just balance is His delight." Do not put God in a base category, or attribute to Him a temper of majestic unconcern, as one chapter succeeds another in our lives or in the history of nations. Never cherish even for a moment the unuttered suspicion that "the Lord will not do good, neither will He do evil." If we believe in a God we must believe in His moral earnestness.

Is it not possible that *this tendency to attenuate God's moral earnestness may underlie the half beliefs and the*

limp, amiable theology of the hour. If it be true that the God in whom we have come to believe would satisfy the Laodicean ideal, the call to repentance loses its urgency, and sin neither needs specific forgiveness upon a basis of righteousness nor will the sinner have to dread an awaiting punishment, keen, overwhelming, irremediable. We can disburden ourselves of the rigid and uncomfortable doctrines of the past. The holiness of God has been exaggerated; the Atonement is a gruesome superfluity; a suffering substitute, who of His own free love bears our mysterious burden, an officious and cumbersome addition to human thought; and the dismal, soul-shaking tragedy of judgment and retribution, a nightmare that vanishes with the first waking up of the reason. All sin is condoned by the process of God's indifference to it, and we simply have to reckon with it here for a moment because of its anti-social forms. He will not trouble Himself about our peccadilloes. A sleeping and an unfaithful Church always wants a sleeping God and a theology which is pure sunshine. A religion without the great doctrines of vicarious sacrifice and retribution at its core, will find its chosen object of worship in One who is slack to emphasise with impressive sanctions the distinctions of right and wrong as they traverse human history.

Those thoughts concerning God to which we lean in our silent meditations, and which influence us in the critical and tempted moments of life, will be subject-matter of Divine judgment. We cannot separate this whispered creed of the heart from selfish and neglectful courses of conduct, for it is that by which we excuse ourselves. The fluid creed within us crystallises into a superstructure of character. The

creed of the heart, moreover, must be judged because we belong to invisible more essentially than to visible spheres. There is a profound significance in these subtle movements of the spirit and disposition. If we hail from spirit spheres and are sweeping fast back upon our return orbit ; if we belong as vitally to realms of mind as of matter ; if thought, influence, mental attitude are to count in the moral universe, God must bring every secret thought into judgment. This whisper of the heart, like the set of the dead leaf in the gust of wind, may be an omen of portentous disaster. The languid creed will be punished along with the languid life. The man who says, "I believe in a Laodicean God," is not only inert and selfish himself, but is bent on making his own characteristic vice dominant on the throne of the Supreme sovereignty.

III. We are reminded of *the far-reaching and inevitable judgment that will one day overtake those who are lethargic in character.* "I will search Jerusalem with candles and punish the men who are settled on their lees."

These words seem to anticipate the local colour of the judgment which in due time came to pass. The ridges of rock on which Jerusalem is built are honeycombed by excavations. Subterranean galleries run in every direction under the temple. Many hiding-places are accessible from the cellars of private houses. A little to the north of the city are underground quarries, from which probably some of the stone for the temple was taken. When the armies of the invader drew near, affrighted priests would rush into the labyrinths beneath the temple foundations, and panic-stricken citizens would seek to hide them-

selves in caverns reached from the cisterns and cellars of their own houses. Many might betake themselves to the mazes of the stone quarries just outside the Damascus gate. But when God had decreed to punish escape was vain, and justice with its flaming torch pursued them into these secret hiding-places. They were no safer here than in the hands of their adversaries. God was searching the city with lights and bringing wrath upon His faithless people in their obscure refuges.

These lethargic souls had said God was slack to fulfil His promise and careless as to the chastisement of every kind of transgression. God will answer the libel by inexorable punishment. Their evil creed had been cherished in secret, but God will bring wrath upon them for their half-formulated aspersions upon His holy zeal, and will find them out in the dim places to which they have fled. It is not only open sins that He will punish. In this judicial visitation He will bring special methods to bear, searching the inner phases of the city life with fearful strictness and sharp illumination. Men had said He was lenient and careless, but such shall not be their experience. They will yet be aghast at the severity with which He searches out secret unspirituality. A speck no bigger than a pinhead may sometimes contain the programme and the password of anarchy, for the anarchist uses photography to reduce the chances of detection when he wants to communicate with his comrades, and the tiny speck may set a continent in a blaze. And so with the little sins and perverted beliefs of our secret hearts. This half-articulate murmur which makes God magnificently inert may have a power of mischief in it

sufficient to wreck a universe. These minute blasphemies and scepticisms God will search out with an illuminating severity nothing can escape.

This sin was more or less veiled, for at one time Jerusalem had been religious to the verge of fanaticism. And in one party in the State there was still enough of zeal to make it expedient for unbelief to be wary and reticent. With the spread of religion and the growth of a strong public opinion there is always a danger lest men should be driven into secret irreligion and unbelief. Pagan contaminations are sometimes latent where there is a devout and zealous exterior. It is said that plants which are native to the sea-shore grow round the margin of the salt-mines in Cheshire, and that the botanist is sometimes surprised to find in the West of England traces of the South American flora. The seeds of the former have been carried from the sea-shore and have grown where they found the sea-shore conditions reproduced, and the seeds of the latter have been brought over in the fleeces shipped from across the sea for the cloth-weaving in the West of England. And we meet with religious eccentricities quite as strange. Pagan weeds often root themselves in the corners and crevices of the city of God and unholy scepticisms thrive in the hearts of those who call themselves by the name of the Lord. The crude, coarse errors, indigenous to Gentile soils, fatalistic creeds, views of the Divine government which make God no holier than an idol, not infrequently grow in the bypaths of religious life and flower shamelessly in sight of the temple itself. That is the danger when the great help religion with their patronage. Men easily glide into little hypocrisies the mischief of which is

immeasurable. A strong opinion in favour of Christianity is something for which we ought to be thankful; but it has its dangers. It may make unbelief an inward and secret disease. We must frown on vice. But in so doing we must beware of giving countenance to clandestine transgression. God will come at last with the blaze of eternity about Him to find out the indifferentist in his deep hiding-place, and He will find him in Jerusalem and in the courts of the temple. Judgment begins at His house. Let us beware of a skin-deep profession. The loftier the privilege, the more minute and deep-searching the judgment.

II

THE TRAGIC SCHISM

"Your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid His face from you."—ISA. lix. 2.

SCIENTIFIC geographers tell us that the islands of the sea range themselves into two distinct classes. Into the first group must be put those which are volcanic in origin and were suddenly projected from the floor of the ocean; also those which are coral reefs and were built up through many generations by the patient and lowly toilers in the blue deeps. Of these Teneriffe and the South Pacific archipelagoes may be taken as the types. Into the second group they put the islands which once formed parts of adjacent continents and which have become cut off in comparatively recent times. Great Britain which was once joined to France, Sicily which was continuous with Italy, and the West Indian Islands which formed a connecting neck between the two Americas are types of the second group. These different classes of islands are easily distinguished from each other. Deep seas encircle those of volcanic origin, and the insects, reptiles, and small quadrupeds which inhabit them, have peculiarities separating the families they

represent from those of the nearest mainland. Comparatively shallow waters flow between the other islands and the continents to which they were joined in prehistoric times, and the forms of life indigenous there show marked signs of kinship with those abounding on the adjacent continents.

Is there not some such classification in that higher realm to which sentient beings belong? The dumb creatures around us may not have been made for direct fellowship with God, and the part they fulfil in the plan of life is not immediately religious. They never were in conscious reciprocal communion with God, and possess, as far as we can see, few points of affinity with the highest life of heaven. Deep, fathomless seas separate between them and what is most Divine. On the other hand, in spite of our yawning separations, we were once vitally joined to God and may yet become one with Him again. We share a common life of reason, righteousness, and love, although that life has been perverted into wayward and eccentric directions. The curious and manifold marks of an ancient attachment may yet be watched, and, for the present at least, the seas that divide hide no such hopeless abysses as seem to sunder between God and some other parts of His creation. The divorce has come within the times to which we reckon back the history of the race—come, it may be, in some instances within the span of the individual life.

It is said that sometimes the ridge of rock or the sand-bank separating the island from the mainland to which it was once joined may be walked across at low tide, or at least traversed by one who will consent to wade. And so when the floods of passion ebb we may see traces of connecting pathways between our-

selves and God and prove that converse with His presence is not a lost possibility of our history.

It was thus with Israel in the days of humiliation and reproach. Its people could look back to times of memorable intimacy with the Most High, when God seemed to be very near and the prayers of prophets and righteous men, possessed an efficacy that had perished from the formal service of recent years. Their one national distinction was this—that God seemed to abide within constant reach of their appeals, and to demonstrate His power for their salvation. Golden days once followed each other in sweet succession, when the Divine glory filled the temple and the gleams of that glory fell everywhere upon the life of the elect people. The cry of despair was then strange as the accents of a foreign tongue, and the Omnipotent was united to His worshippers in succour, help, and holy converse. They shared His thought, drank His life, participated in His power and triumphant sovereignty. But that age had fled. Theophanies and interpositions were becoming pale traditions, and prayer was so rarely answered that the pious remnant of the elect race might be tempted to doubt its virtue. And yet the memorials of this retreating and decadent religious history had not utterly perished. There were still stirrings and faint survivals of an old life of piety in the race which bespoke its early attachment to a covenant God.

There may possibly be in us and in the communities to which we belong a like experience of decline. Restraints and reservations, which we call the spirit of the age, have wedged themselves in between our souls and God. "Times change and we change with them," is the apologetic description we give of this melancholy

revolution. We should like to say God has changed, but that would be too blunt, brutal, profane. We live in a less genial religious atmosphere, to which we assuredly contribute something, and are ready to put down our waning fervour to some psychological transition, inevitable as a climatic change. The God who looms upon us through this new world-spirit is cold, impassive, slightly supercilious. He does not make it His chief glory to compassionate and to save men. The object of our worship has shrunk into an ungrasped secret, a cabalistic puzzle, an ontological formula, and we are no longer drawn to Him. There was once a union that seemed to be vital, but much has come between us. Now do not let us flatter ourselves by assuming that we feel so differently, because a new glacial epoch is stealing upon the world. It is true we seem to be locked in gulfs of ice, but we have held the steering-wheel for some time past and have plunged ourselves there. The world and sin—that national stupor and sordidness to which we are surrendering—have come in between our souls and God. We have lost contact with Him to whom we were once joined in holy covenant, permitting ourselves to be insulated into practical atheism, and therefore is it that prayer seems idle.

It can only be that conditions of moral repulsion have been set up between ourselves and God, should He ever seem to disappoint us and cast out our prayer. God's resources can never verge on exhaustion. As the prophet reminds us, there can be neither abridgment of His power nor decline of His tender responsiveness. Where separation comes to pass the force of disseverment and alienation can only be that of sin. This theory and no other explains the depressing fact.

He who is *the spring of life can know neither impoverishment nor limitation*, and the changes and fluctuations of the universe can no more project themselves into His being than the casting of a leaf or the shedding of a blossom from the tree can impair the vital forces entrenched in its roots. The heathen man will sometimes say, "The gods are growing old; they are not so ready in helping their worshippers as when we were young." An Eternal Spirit is secure against such an innuendo. There can be term of neither time nor space put to His wisdom, power, sovereign skill. The decadence of the Infinite is unthinkable. Soils may yield up their virtues and be no longer fruitful, races may reach the meridian of their energies and decline, suns may be so lavish of their brightness that they will sink at last into dimness and decrepitude, but no decay or enfeeblement can ever come to the attributes of the Most High. Reserve forces are within Him competent to the making of myriads of other universes as vast and wonderful as that into whose expanse we look; and it is less than nothing to answer our little, finite prayers, if it is fitting they should be heard. Such is His power. "His arm is not shortened that it cannot save."

And there can be *no failure of care for our welfare* or slackening off in His inclination to help us. Unless God be a fiction of the brain He must be predisposed to save and succour the people He has formed for Himself. The age-long impulse by which He draws men to religion is a sufficient proof of that. This bent towards worship, suppliancy, converse with the Supreme, God Himself has put into primitive man and kept alive in His countless offspring; which is the sure sign that He wants the homage

and devotion of the race. He makes the heart to turn towards Himself by one of its oldest and deepest instincts, because from the beginning He has been turning in love towards mankind and listening for its cries. Just as streams running down from confronting hills into the same valley must blend unless there be ridges and ramparts of rock to keep them apart, so the soul that seeks a seeking God must surely meet Him, unless some portentous obstacle interpose itself. This unvarying tendency, which is ever inclining man to God and God to man, asserts itself through all religious history, which otherwise shrinks into an effete romance.

And in the case before the thought of the prophet, Israel is a son, and God a fond and pitiful Father brimming with yearning and unstinted solicitudes. Is it not an earthly parent's crowning delight to hear the cry for help and answer it? We should not like our children to start life with a robust self-sufficiency which would preclude them from appealing to us for help and counsel. It is against nature for fatherhood to hold back its hand and close both ears to the voice of its offspring; and love would always fain lavish its gifts as profusely as the rising sun sheds its genial light. And with a munificence of sympathy and succour strange to relationships that are wholly finite, the infinite Fatherhood must draw men to itself with an intensity proportional to its own vastness. More easily might veils of mist keep apart suns rushing into fusion with each other, or an Indian's little row of fishing-nets dam back the inflowing tide of the Amazon, than any barrier less formidable than that of sin separate between man and the passionate love of his Divine Maker and Friend. It is only a

moral impediment of the most portentous character that can keep God and the children of His household apart. When we take into account what God really is, the chief mystery of the world is that any prayer in it should go unanswered, and the mystery is one with the mystery of iniquity itself. It was no wonder that He whose everlasting home had been in the bosom of infinite love should marvel at that which is so commonplace to us—unbelief. What a side-light does this cast upon the terrible significance of sin! It is the one thing which keeps God and His creatures apart. We are ready to put forward any and every explanation of the gloom, the bitterness and God-forsaken desolation of our lives, but the moral. Sin is the tragic schism, the great divide, parting off worlds in which God hides His face from those in which He reveals the glory of His loving-kindness. Sin is the one only thing which compels God to act as though He were keeping aloof from our reproach and woe. And this is the paramount condemnation of sin; it bereaves the human spirit of God—its one essential good. Those disasters it works before our eyes are more limited in the range of their significance. It blunts the wit, it corrodes the affections, it sows discord and strife in the home, turning the picture of Eden into the type of Tophet, it fills graves dug years too soon, it saps the health of nations, it disintegrates empires and destroys civilisations; but, greatest feat of sinister power, it separates between God and the spirits made for His presence and service.

The *conditions of modern business* life are sometimes adduced as an excuse for the waning spirit of prayer and the outfading consciousness of Divine

help. Men plead that they have scarcely time or heart to pray, and that God is less easily apprehended than in the quiet, idyllic dawns and twilights of the olden days. The all-infecting frenzy of the age makes this world more like a madhouse than a shrine of sacred stillness where God is met. If business does unfit its votaries for realising God's presence and power, it can only be for one of three reasons, all alike bearing the taint of sin and justifying the declaration of the prophet. You seek unlawful ends in business, or you seek lawful ends by unlawful means, or the methods of conducting business tend to kindle within you unlawful passions. It is quite possible that the sin which separates may be entrenched in the very nature of the worldly avocation. To believe that Providence has put men into some of the pursuits which occupy them is rank blasphemy. God, however, can make Himself known to men under all conditions but those of wilful sin, and if He has fixed your vocation and there is something in it that puts God far from you, that barrier is what you have perversely built up, and not what God has placed there by the determinative act of His Providence. Is it likely that He will define for any of His children a vocation that will reduce them to the practical footing of atheists? Would you introduce your child to a calling that would not only compel him to live on the other side of the world, but cut him off likewise from all means of communication with you and identify him with your enemies? In the human brain it is said there are six hundred million cells. Is it likely that God has thrust you into an occupation so complex in its interests and multiform in its demands, that every one of these six

hundred million cells is occupied by the processes of secular thought, whilst God Himself, the Great Maker of the intricate fabric, is shut out? Can you imagine a king building a palace of fabulous capacity and then crowding it with aliens from the ends of the earth and leaving himself no corner for rest or sojourn there? If the palace is so crowded that the king cannot enter, rest assured a usurper has got possession of it. Your thoughts cannot be so filled with strictly legitimate things that there will be no room there for God and His operations. If He is shut out and is a mere stranger and casual in the sphere of your life, if answered prayer is a phenomenon of which you have little or no experience, if the lighting down of God's saving power is a hypothesis for the testing of which you have hitherto had no opportunity, it is because sin has barred God out. No reason other than that can bereave you of His all-availing help.

We are sometimes ready to put down this tragic schism *to the progress of scientific thought.* Men's hearts are petrified by the new dogma that the order of the universe is unalterable, along with its godless corollary, that to pray is to fritter away time, strength, and vital force, and to vex one's own soul. God is dessicated, systematised into a scheme of mechanics, turned into an ingenious automaton conditioned by his own methods. He is depicted as though bound hand and foot, an unconsenting auditor to human prayers, magnificently incompetent to consider our desires; and that being so, it is no great compliment paid to the wisdom and authority of His decrees when we make supplication before Him. We have grown so all-knowing, forsooth, that

prayer has lost its reality, and we have long since fallen out of sympathetic intimacy with the Most High. Perhaps we may one day see that the modern argument against prayer, is the cast-off garment of the old theological fatalism, turned and remade with a few scraps of science to trim it into the fashion.

Now if God spoke by the prophet and put the right interpretation upon our attitude, there is more in spiritual estrangement than such an apology admits. Let the difficulties raised by the new science be freely allowed. Upon even devout minds these views of the uniformity of Nature and her methods, be they proven or unproven, may so act as to check the temper of prayerfulness. Temptation does take on intellectual forms as it addresses itself to thinking people. But when the utmost concession has been made to scientific claims, is this an adequate statement of the changed relations between ourselves and God? If a child were to find out that his father's estate had been signed over to trustees, and that for a certain term of years that father could not be altogether a free agent in providing for the wants of his household, all immediate expenditure being determined by some outside authority, and if on that ground the child were to break off relations with his father, would not that be the mark of a mean, depraved, repulsive character?—The needs of the household are no longer supplied by his hands, and I will not trouble to see his face or solicit his approbation. Supposing that God had made Nature His plenipotentiary, or trustee, and for the time being had surrendered His own power of answering supplication for temporal benefits, it would surely be base in

us to use that as a plea whereby to justify ourselves in restraining prayer before Him. We should only prove that the noblest part of the exercise had hitherto lacked attraction for us, and thus uphold the word of the prophet that sin separates from God and bereaves us of His help and favour. If we were loving God, sympathising with His character, seeking to further His counsels, we should continue to pray whether so-called laws of nature permitted an answer to many of our prayers or not. The decline of prayer in the man who has discovered that nothing in the physical universe can ever swerve from its determined pathway, shows a moral void in character which is one and the same thing with the accusation made by the prophet. It may be that we want excuses for giving up prayer, although some doubtless abandon it with deep pain of heart.

The *problems of temperament* are sometimes brought in to explain this tragic schism. Men palliate their callousness to prayer and their misgivings concerning its benefits by putting them down to deficiency of sentiment or imagination, matter-of-factness, poverty of the religious instinct, congenital disability answering to colour-blindness in the physical realm. It is assumed, upon very slender proof, that a peculiar poise of the faculties disqualifies for enthusiastic spiritual beliefs. Many who have wilfully neglected and impoverished the sense of religion eagerly accept this interpretation of their case. They tell us perhaps that they prayed in deference to early training but never found the exercise congenial; little, moreover, seemed to come of it, and they soon gave up the habit. If a prayer-hearing God there be, and He had wished them to come into sensible

converse with Him, He would have put another impress on their aptitudes.

Now it may be allowed that from the intellectual standpoint people are variously endowed and equipped; but a man's religious history is not determined by the quality, condition, or specialised habits of the brain. It is simply impossible for a man to have capacity for common truth, practical righteousness, philanthropy, family life and friendship, and yet to have no capacity for converse with God, whose nature is the spring and animating principle of all these qualities. For what is God but living truth, active righteousness, philanthropy in unresting daily movement, conscious friendship, throbbing fatherhood, reaching out beseechingly to all who can enter into corresponding experiences? A man might just as well declare that he had pleasures in puddles but not in rivers or mountain lakes, in table flowers but not in blossoming Edens, in finger exercises but not in consummate music, in the colours of worsteds but not in the pageant of sunsets. There is necessary kinship between God and all moral beings, and to have no capacity for God is to have no aptitude for ethical life, and to be something less than human. Boulders are embedded in the cliffs of Norfolk which belong to no mountains of our own but to the mountains of Norway. They are the records of a time when that county was continuous with the continent of Europe, and betoken an ancient geographical kinship. And every man who is fit for the rights of a citizen, and who is justly described when we speak of him as a moral and responsible being, bears some sign of his ancient union with God, and some pledge of his fitness to enter anew into that fellowship. Man

is religious by constitution and irreligious only by errancy of habit and practical life. He who moves in a realm where God is not has ostracised himself by some secret or open transgression. We wish to keep the strip of sea between ourselves and our Continental neighbours, and are set against all schemes for tunnelling the channel because of our mutual incompatibilities of interest, habit, and history. If we were leavened with a common life the objection would cease. And so God will permit us to come nearer to Him and will draw very near to us when our moral antipathies wither and disappear. Does prayer seem barren and God unresponsive and heaven very far off? It can only be explained by our lack of oneness with the Divine will and law.

The *inscrutable methods of God's sovereignty* are sometimes adduced to explain away this ominous separation referred to by the prophet. Now and again occasions arise when the Lord does seem to withdraw Himself from His people. The sad complaint comes even from devout lips that prayer is rejected and despised; and men can get no further in their interpretation of the darkness. They are tempted to think of God as though He were a recluse, and without any intelligible reason chose to shut Himself off from the turmoil and desolation of the world. Just as the overwrought business man goes away, when need arises, leaving no address to which messages can be sent, so God sees fit for a time to withdraw Himself from direct communication with His Church. He puts a wall about His person and we feel as though He had forbidden us to plead our cause before Him. He hides Himself in impene-

trable clouds, and, to quote the Psalmist, "withdraws His hand, even His right hand," although He once "wrought salvation in the midst of the earth." It seems to us that He does this as a sheer assertion of His majesty or to make us feel the terror of His power. He leaves us for a time to a thick darkness like that enshrouding the cross, and in answer to our cry no pitying voice comes from the realms of stupendous eclipse.

Well, there are inexplicable factors in God's dealings with us, but those factors belong chiefly to the sphere of providence rather than to that of grace. More often than not, it is sin which veils God and His goodness from the sad, breaking, woe-begone heart, and we shall not get out of the gloom by closing our eyes to the explanation and assuming that this terrible silence of the Most High, this apparent indisposition to help, at the mere thought of which the heart sickens and faints, is one of the decrees of His unsearchable sovereignty.

We often speak of the family circle, and the mathematician's definition of a circle is not without its lessons—a figure, every part of which is equally distant from the centre. God's children form a family circle, and my position of privilege is just as near as that of Abraham, Samuel, Elijah, John, Paul. If it seem more distant and remote it is because I have got out of the circle by unfilial tempers and rebellious acts. The assembly of the faithful is not like a cricket or football-field in which one is planted by the captain a little nearer the centre of the game and another a little further away. We are equally near to God by the right of redemption, and if we chance to find ourselves afar off it is

sin which separates. "Is He the God of the Jew and not of the Gentile also?" "The same Lord is rich unto all that call upon Him."

This separation is often *veiled from us by the illusions of the senses* and the pomps of this present evil world. It needs much courage and sobriety of mind to realise the perils with which it is fraught. Near the source of one of the great rivers of the East there stands a Buddhist monastery of widespread fame, built on the edge of a beetling cliff. In the chasm beneath, clouds are often seen floating, upon which the pilgrims who have climbed to the shrine, look down. Under certain conditions of the sun and atmosphere a magnificent phenomenon appears. The sun, greatly enlarged and begirt with coruscations of prismatic splendour, is reflected upon the screen of vapours. From the central disc shafts of gold and purple and violet pulse and throb. The devotees call the sight "the glory of Buddha," and when the prismatic marvel appears, half mad with religious frenzy, they cast themselves into the palpitating mass of colour, falling unconscious suicides into the grim gulf below, to which only vultures and jackals can approach.

And the separating chasm between ourselves and God is often filled up with a meretricious pomp that disguises its tragedies, and men are again and again betrayed into self-destruction. Perhaps it is a vision of the world with its wealth and power that scintillates there, the gorgeous phantoms which passed before the eye on the mount of the temptation. All the hues of Vanity Fair shimmer beneath our feet, and we think surely we may plunge into the iridescence that seems to beckon us. Or it may

be the glory of Nature spreads itself athwart the yawning gulf. She interposes the magic of her shows, entices with the glory of her stately order, usurps the nimbus of a factitious sovereignty and takes the very place of God Himself. The gulf dividing from God is hidden by her enchantments. Or the rainbow glories of an æsthetic religion veil the deep moral separation. Men sometimes commit ethical suicide under the cover of an ornate worship. We cultivate art, music, the devices that enthral the senses and call the product piety, forgetting that we are in no sense at one with God. Pageants superimpose themselves upon unwelcome facts, and underneath the circles of deceitful splendour there gape gulfs of deep and irretrievable perdition. If sin is ignored, unconfessed, unforsaken, if unflattering truths are obstinately disguised, we shall find at last that our capacity for communion with God is lost and our doom is an abyss from which there can be no uplifting.

The form assumed by our personal sin may be so secret and subtle that it is easy for us to think that, in our case at least, this is not the malign force which separates from God and makes His presence fleeting as a dream. We have not been guilty perchance of glaring, flagitious, anti-social transgressions which provoke the reproaches of those who watch our behaviour. Yet spiritual sins may cleave to us which work portentous mischief in the religious life. Pathologists found difficulty in identifying the bacillus of an epidemic that has become sorrowfully familiar to us ; not only because it was one of the tiniest of all microscopic organisms, but chiefly because it could not be stained with the dyes used in studying other minute forms of life. Yet what a messenger of

sorrow and death it was! This hideous trifle brought swift and cruel separation to husband and wife, parent and child, lover and friend, and put the silence and deep gloom of the grave between thousands of victims and the sweet sunny homes in which they would fain have tarried. Now some sins have a criminal dye put upon them by statutory law, are branded by the damnatory force of public opinion, or show red like crimson because of the disintegrating influence they begin to exert at once upon the individual and the society to which he belongs. Other sins do not stand out in conspicuous colours. Men have no apparent interest in describing them as atrocities. Unless we are watchful and cultivate keen spiritual perceptions, these more obscure forms of sin are apt to elude our consciousness. And yet they may separate between us and our God, hiding from us His blessed face and bringing us into a realm in which prayer will be unheard. We must not be hard nor make the definition of sin arbitrary and impracticably strict, yet the germinating thought, the immature and inarticulate lust, the unacknowledged purpose of wrong which lies covert in the soul, the ignoble submission to expediency, the digression from principle which the world will praise as prudent, the inward recoil of thought from God and His economies of working, may separate between us and the great hearer of prayer.

Does the age declare that no sure voice comes to us from the Eternal, that God's face is hopelessly hidden to human vision, that intelligent and sympathetic converse with His Spirit is impossible? The age is self-condemned by its own tempers and fashions. No separation other than that which is

moral can come in between man and the Being for whom he was made. "Draw nigh to God, and He will draw nigh unto you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye doubleminded." God waits to be discovered anew, but by the method set forth in the counsels of St. James.

III

MISTRUST THAT DESTROYS

"A fire was kindled against Jacob, and anger also went up against Israel; because they believed not in God, and trusted not in His salvation."—PSA. lxxviii. 21, 22.

THERE are morbid growths in the human frame which our doctors divide into two groups—benign and malignant; and the distinction often comes to mean the distinction between life and death. In dealing with the unbelief which crosses our pathway and even creeps into our homes, it is most important that we should observe the same principle of minute and discriminating classification, and beware of confusing things that entirely differ. The Bible sets us the example, and in its pages we may find types that with a touch of the doctor's sardonic flattery we may venture to call "benign," and types that are radically and ostentatiously "malignant." Some phases of scepticism are chiefly intellectual; morbid, weakening, and hurtful all the same: phases which begin to assume a moral complexion when a man parades them as a beggar parades his sores, and it may be frets and keeps them open when they tend to heal. And on the other hand there are scepticisms which are moral in their beginnings

and which tend to destroy the most vital fibres of the conscience and the character. We are sometimes reminded of the sceptics of the Bible. Job who challenged God and His ways, the Psalmists who were so distracted and overstrained by the terrors of their lot that it appeared as though the throne of the Eternal had vanished, Habakkuk when he penned the first chapter of his prophecies and seemed to cry into an unheeding ear, John the Baptist in prison with few of his early hopes left, belong to this category. Their scepticisms, however, were brief moods half forced upon them by the troubles through which they passed, and having recovered their imperilled faith they held by it to the end. To these holy men whose doubts were symptoms of suffering rather than of a depraved moral life, God was ever patient, gentle, unfailing in forbearance. His tolerance is unutterably grand. But there is an unbelief which is malignant in its root motives, intertwined with the gravest issues of conduct, and which provokes God's hottest displeasure. It is of such unbelief that Moses speaks, and the writer of these Psalms which describe the transgressions of the wilderness, and the Apostle Paul in the Epistle to the Corinthians, as well as the anonymous author of the Epistle to the Hebrews.

We shall blunder mischievously in our dealings with men unless we look studiously at these various phases of unbelief and learn to distinguish them from each other. There is a doubt towards which the great Master of human souls is as patient as towards the misgivings of John, and there is a doubt which He gibbets as an "evil and adulterous" temper like that of the scribes and the Sadducees. There is a doubt

"not unto death" which is little more than an intellectual embarrassment, provoked perhaps by misconceptions of God's word or by errors in its interpretation, and there is a fatal doubt which depraves the character and life, and provokes to fierce displeasure the most patient and long-suffering Being in the universe.

We are told that in the case of the Israelites this malignant type of doubt was an infection brought by the mixed multitude into the camp of the redeemed. In the wake of the Exodus many had come who were mere hangers-on of mixed parentage, who had not been nurtured in a holy faith or trained to strictness and nobility of life, and who had neither part nor lot in the Covenant promise. Their fitful and whining unbelief was closely identified with loose morals and a low standard of conduct. They had never been inspired with the high religious aspirations of the children of Abraham. It is easy to understand the position of things, for at the present time the mixed multitude is often a forcing-bed of unbelief, and of that malignant form of unbelief which kindles the fierce displeasure of the Almighty.

Unbelief is malignant when it is *a product of the flesh and its tyrannous appetites.* Of that we have an instructive example in the text. Tastes, fancies, capricious lusts must be humoured and abundantly satisfied; and He was scarcely worth calling God whose sovereign providence took no account of these elementary wants. It was mockery to speak of the state into which they had come as "salvation" unless the palate could be adequately catered for. "They trusted not in His salvation." God's salvation was a poor pretence if it meant less than the fish,

melons, and cucumbers they had left behind on crossing the Red Sea. The milk and honey, the grapes, and the goodly land were a long way off, dreamier even than the dainties of Egypt, for these they had seen. The wilderness dietary called for improvement, at least from their standpoint. That was not a guiding angel, a ministering presence, a guardian providence altogether to their minds, which brought them through the depths of the sea and forgot coupons for the banquets that should have been arranged for them at the different stages of their journey.

If the programme of these querulous and unbelieving ringleaders had been carried out, the twelve tribes would never have been inured to hardship, braced to strength and to valour, hardened to sinewy fortitude, and made fit by an unwearying and indomitable faith for the conquest and possession of the promised land. In the midst of their toils and privations the fretful descendants of Abraham were having the best possible training for prowess, sovereignty, full salvation. What was it that made the dervish hordes of the Soudan strong for years against the resources of European civilisation? The rigour of desert drill and discipline. And such illustrations might be multiplied. One-half of our salvation is ethical, and therefore implies discipline. God was in the act of inwardly saving Israel by discipline, a more important step even than breaking the yoke of Egypt, and it ought to have been enough for them that they were in the hands which had divided the sea and made ready angels' food for their needs. For awhile they got the world they asked, and it proved a world festering with plague brought by flocks of quails

from the marshes of the Red Sea. The ideal world of the unbeliever—the world stored with luxury and teeming with sensuous delights, the world from which all pain and rigour and chastening discipline have been banished, always proves itself a Kibroth-hattaavah, a grave of lust where grand aspirations are buried, and the sand-storms of the desert pitilessly efface every trace of past hope and promise.

Unbelievers with a turn for science sometimes tell us they could plan a much better world than the phantom God of the Bible has ever succeeded in making. They even venture to give us fragmentary inklings of their plans and specifications. But the world bepraised by a base materialism is a world without tears, without burdens, without privations, without chastenings, lacking a training commensurate to the capacities of human nature, a world in which men and women may eat, drink, and be merry, and never feel the spur which incites to quest of a better ; a sumptuous dining-car species of planet sweeping sweetly round the sun; a world surely in which a race beginning to bear God's image would be bound to sink back into dull, gluttonous brutes. We look at the world from very different standpoints. Foolish and short-sighted wayfarers that we are, we fancy that world would be ideal in which every sense is ministered to ; and we are tempted to mistrust God when we fail to get our ideal world, not realising how such a world would utterly spoil us and bring God's best counsels concerning us to nought. We look at the world from the standpoint of our skin-deep sensibilities, and God looks at it from the standpoint of the disciplines needed by those who are to wait in His presence. We call that world best which yields the

richest returns to the senses, but God calls that world best which brings out the best things in our character. The Eternal God thinks of the ages of immortal service that lie before us and of the spiritual greatness of which we are the destined heirs, and He says, "This is the best of all possible worlds for My children, till they are built up into a stable and holy life."

It is true there are pains and unequal stresses in the world which do not belong to its original scheme, and for the wrongs which sting some of our fellow-men into irreligion it ill becomes a servant of God to apologise. When God gives His people a bitter cup to drink, it is no duty of ours to put in a few extra drops of wormwood and gall. Not a little illogical atheism would vanish like mildew in the sunshine, if we honestly and unselfishly applied Christian principles in the state and the municipality, the workshop and the home. Whilst passing through the wilderness, Moses and Aaron and the elders of Israel did not bring with them camel-loads of figs and dates and dried fish and skins of wine and an Egyptian *chef* to soften the discomforts of the way, but were at commons with the rest. The man who had been nurtured in Pharaoh's household was the last to complain of the hardships of the pilgrimage, and his speech and manner of life never once made it harder for a single Israelite to trust God and obey His word. But when all has been said, and full allowance made for the unbelief which is a distemper of the baffled intellect, it is clear there is an unbelief which is identified with the basest passions of the flesh; and men daily impeach the world because it puts a limit to their lusts and mocks their clamant appetites and impeach the God who made it.

The other day I saw a tree which was bearing two different kinds of leaves, and that not as the result of grafting or cross-fertilisation. On some of the branches the leaves were like the fronds of a fern, and were said to be a reversion to the shape borne by the primitive ancestor. And sometimes in the same life we may find thriving in vital intimacy the unbelief which seems to be a product of the latest culture of the reason and the unbelief which takes its rise in uncouth and barbaric passions. Types of unbelief may now and again be curiously compounded.

Our fleshly passions always tend to make us distrustful of the spiritual and the unseen, and this drift in the passions sometimes warps the reason and deflects the moral sense, and has done so for generations, so that we inherit a maimed aptitude for faith. It is only by the subjugation of the flesh that we become susceptible of the faith that God seeks from us. Men may be mistrustful malcontents because they do not find themselves in the kind of world upon which they have set their foolish desire. The atheist is occasionally a person who cannot get all the beer he wants. Now and again men gnash their teeth upon religious belief because Divine law puts restraint upon their lusts and upholds the strict sanctities of marriage and the home. The ideal world that would convince them of the Maker's benevolence would be a world fluttering with hosts of unclaimed houris. There are men who are unbelievers because their vanity has been vexed and their ambition thwarted, and in the scheme of things which would win them to faith and approval, others must needs be found bowing at their feet. Such an arrangement might not altogether commend itself

to the poor slaves who had to do them honour, and the leaven of unholy doubt purged out from one place would work in another Can God give well-served dinners and a four hours' day of light duties, with packs of cards and racehorses to fill up the intervals? Why did He not make the world pain-proof? Do not every pang of hunger and every stroke of disease, every drop of spilt blood and every bitter unheeded tear that wets the cheek of woman or child discredit His sovereignty? The ideal world a proper God should have made, is an interminable boulevard arched with cloudless blue, strewn with flowers and palm-branches, and trodden by hosts of gay, laughing pleasure-seekers to whom no mischance or privation could ever come. They would have believed in the good God if the scheme of the universe had been any approach to that. Such silly conceits ignore our need of teaching, correction, discipline, and the world for which our unbridled fancy cries would prove itself a ghastly scene of degeneration, taking us back by swift, straight steps into a coarse and degrading animalism. We had better have progress in a desert than loathsome retrogression in an earthly paradise. If our lot is cast in weary and monotonous wastes, God is at least making us free, brave, trustful, obedient, strong to endure by stern training and thorny experience. In spite of our pains and heart-aches we can surely believe that God is lifting us out of serfdom and equipping us for royal destinies. Emancipation does not always lie by the way of orchards and rose-gardens. God's programme of life and salvation differs from ours, and this often tempts us to be unbelieving. Some of us make it a condition of the trust God asks

from us that we shall first get all we want. If even we had succeeded in that, our temper of mind would not be sensibly improved, for there are longings within us that God only can interpret and satisfy in His own way.

Another sign of malignant unbelief is that *it thwarts men in working out the appointed problems of life and salvation.* The scepticism that God blamed and punished in the camp of Israel was not technical or academic in its forms. It was not alleged against it that it held by the science current in Egypt and repudiated Moses and his methods. Controversy did not even arise because the leaders of the mixed multitude claimed for the historical records of Egypt an authority superior to that of the traditions brought by Abraham from Chaldea. Much of the scepticism of the present day is in its earlier phases of this speculative and theoretical type. Unbelief is often found playing the part of a busybody, and concerning itself with questions that are more or less beyond the scope of immediate duty. We find the scientific mind smouldering with resentment because unscientific definitions of the supernatural have been current in religious circles, just as if such accidents were of the essence of faith. The mind trained to methods of historical research is exasperated to contempt by the uncritical methods of pietists who do not grasp the human part in revelation, and the Bible is despised because of the narrowness and illiteracy of some good Christians who honour it. The man needs our richest pity over whom, for any of these reasons, the Bible has lost its authority. But the obligations of faith are first of all those which present themselves in the pathway of our common duty, and when those obligations

are met, we shall probably find the further claim the Bible makes upon our faith easier of fulfilment. Unbelief is sometimes like the article prepared at a peasant's illicit still, produced away from the common highways of life and in some secluded nook over the edge of the world. Many a man loses his faith in God and in God's sovereignty over life because of the enigma of pain—and a stupendous enigma it often is. You ask such a one, Is it because of something that you yourself have suffered that you have ceased to believe? and he will answer, No. Is it, then, because of something that one near and dear to you has suffered? and he will still answer, No. His faith has been staggered by the woes and martyrdoms of those who scarcely lie within the dimmest circumference of his life. Not infrequently faith breaks down through musing upon the pain that racks so many kingdoms of the animal world. Men have been haunted by the scenes of strife and cruelty observed through the lens of a microscope in a drop of ditch-water, and have found themselves riveted for months to the borderland which lies between melancholia and atheism. I am expecting every day to meet the man who will tell me that he can no longer believe in God's goodness because he suspects there is something amiss in the way in which the affairs of Sirius are administered. Very often it happens that the unbelief we have cultivated so far afield, we bring back into the circle of our common duties, and find ourselves torn, disheartened, disabled in the presence of providential tasks which lie ready to our hand. That is where the condemnation begins. The unbelief which is malignant, kindling a fire against Jacob and wrath against Israel, is that which reduces

men to the level of the brute before the lofty calls and solemn problems of daily life. When we come back to that standpoint, we shall have no difficulty in ascertaining whether these morbid growths within the soul are benign or malignant. The distrust which puts us into a wrong attitude towards God, which leaves us helpless when the voice of duty bids, which strips us of courage and hope when the cross of pain and shame is before us, is the unbelief which damns, the essential vice Paul had in view when he penned the words, "Whatsoever is not of faith is sin."

That unbelief is malignant which *impeaches a God who is in the very act of proving His covenant friendship with us* and leading us forth into freedom, privilege, blessedness. We are sometimes asked to treat unbelief as if it were a divergent opinion upon debatable questions of religion and philosophy. If the God at whose sovereign rule railing accusations were hurled had been the subject of a dead tradition only, an undiscovered mystery, or revealed only to a limited caste of priests, as the Egyptian systems held, if His existence had been nothing more than an interesting and a noble speculation, mistrust would not have been so heinous as the Bible paints it, and judicial fire would have been a wanton cruelty. But these people had the sign of the Divine presence in their midst. We are accustomed to discuss God as if He were shut up in a far-off heaven, an august alien, or at least no close, living, constant ally of our own; and if that be the correct view unbelief cannot be a flagrant spiritual misdemeanour; He is outside the scheme of our lives, and will scarcely deign to take us into His reckoning. It is preposterous to assume that unbelief can anger Him. No serious mischief is

done if you assert that the biggest ivory merchant in Khartoum or Timbuctoo has run away from his creditors, for he belongs to a different commercial world; but if you say it of a leading firm with which you have daily dealings, the consequences may be serious. If some private soldier were to denounce the generalship of Hannibal or Epaminondas the incident would be passed by without observation; but if, when ordered into action, he were to denounce in the same terms that of Lord Roberts or the Sirdar, he would be shot without mercy. Some of our historians discuss the character of Queen Elizabeth with a license that would make it high treason if the same things were said about Queen Victoria. In the one case because the potentate is dead and cannot be affected by the controversy, the words have the value of historical criticism only; in the other case they would constitute a capital offence against the Crown. God besets us behind and before with His unsleeping love, and our murmurings and blasphemies reach His ear and wound His pitiful heart. The unbelief which affronts God is that which denies His personal sovereignty over us and impugns His gracious ministry in our lives. It is no idle theory of the Divine government we discuss with our comrades, as we walk together through the wilderness. God is in our very midst, linked with us in a thousand ways, challenging our gratitude in countless acts of lovingkindness, moment by moment ministering the breath of life as truly as the doctor keeps some half-dead patient alive by artificial respiration, for "in Him we live and move and have our being"; and if God were to withdraw from us life would go out. He hears the gainsaying of His

people still, every syllable of it. Your lack of faith implies that He has dumped you down in the wilderness with no guidance, no salvation, no foredetermined programme, no overshadowing cloud, no pillar of fire, no uplifted cross to lead your onward steps. For a follower to say this of the explorer to whose service he has sworn himself would be mutiny, and for us to assert it of the Leader and Perfecter of our faith is as grave an impeachment as human language can express. We are in the thick of a critical movement, and unbelief is not the particular side taken in a pastime debate upon an abstract question. We are not dealing merely with the history of effete religions, and our mistrust is not the epitaph penned by a distempered soul for the tomb of a departed God. Our vaunted doubt is an affront to a living Benefactor, a stab at the warm love that is ever brooding over us, a gross filial impiety; for the signs that our lives are under covenant guidance are as indisputable as those vouchsafed to Israel of old, however much they may differ in form. If you flatter yourself that it is only the God of an empty tradition you disparage in your modes of unbelief, you eliminate the most noteworthy facts from your experience of life, and judge with disastrous prejudice. God is nearer to us than all others, directing our steps to right ends, moulding our characters by wise chastisement, and clinging tenaciously to the faint promise of better things that may yet be in us; and it is all this which puts the culminating blackness upon our unbelief.

Unbelief is malignant when *the most memorable experiences of our history furnish sufficient warrant for the faith we are required to exercise.* Such was the

case with the children of Israel in the wilderness. That phase of the subject strikes the imagination of the Psalmist, and he reminds us of the shocking contrast between what their eyes had already seen and the evil words their lips were now muttering. "Yet He commanded the skies from above and opened the doors of heaven; and He rained down manna upon them to eat and gave them of the corn of heaven." Such unbelief as they avowed might have been less unseemly before the first plague alighted upon Egypt, and the first wonder had been wrought for their salvation. God never asks from men an arbitrary and impossible faith, and it will always be found that He has prepared us by the lessons of our previous history for the next heroic act of trust that is required. In God's order for our education in this cardinal virtue, the intricate, the complex, the formidable do not come first, although misguided men do not always respect God's order. The duties of faith are graded just as carefully as a child's scales in music or his first exercises in reading. The infant who can scarcely climb upstairs is not set to scale Mount Ararat. God's providence puts the demands of faith in a rational series, and we must rise in harmony with our personal experience of His grace and power. There can be no believing and no duty to believe, apart from a mystic allurement and a Divine discipline and training which fit us to meet the obligation. God—oh that you would but recognise the fact!—has been quietly making you ready for all the trust which He longs to find in you.

It is easy to see how in this, as in other respects, Jesus Christ reflects God's methods. His challenge to faith is preceded by a carefully arranged series of

incidents. He did not meet the disciples with the question, "Whom say ye that I the Son of man am?" when they first crossed His path by the banks of the Jordan, or when He saw them by the Lake of Galilee and bade them leave their nets and learn to be fishers of men. He tested them in the higher orthodoxy only after they had been with Him for more than two years. It was not at His first official visit to the temple that He asked the Pharisees, "What think ye of Christ?" He had prepared them to answer the question in part at least by His holy teaching and wonderful works. Jesus Christ did not press men to the exercise of a premature and an uncorroborated faith. He never traded upon human credulity. He even forbade the disciples to speak of the transfiguration till after His resurrection from the dead, knowing that the one event must confirm and support the other. He did not expect the arch to stand till the keystone had been put into it. The demand for faith is cumulative, and the longer our experience of His guiding and saving ministry, the greater the obligation that rests upon us. It is perhaps a mistake even to insist upon faith in everything the Bible contains till the personal history has justified faith in God's living, redeeming, and immortal sovereignty. Happy the man who from the beginning can take the Bible as a warrant of the faith he must exercise in God at every stage of his life and under every testing crisis. In some minds, alas! faith in the marvels of the Bible is complicated with theories of the special mode by which those marvels were brought to pass. The faith God seeks must be achieved first of all in connection with the problems of our personal life, and when it is achieved there, the stupendous

histories and pronouncements of the Bible will no longer cause us to stumble.

These Israelites were not asked at their initiation into the new life implicitly to accept the incidents of the Divine appearances to Abraham and Jacob's vision of descending angels and the story of supernatural conflict by the brook Jabbok. If they had thought more about these sublime histories it would have been well for them, and have proved a safeguard against the unbelief which blighted their fortunes. But their first duty was to trust in a Divine Guide and Deliverer amidst the evil chances and discomforts of their pilgrimage, and the first duty achieved would have made the second easy. They could not help granting that wonderful things had been brought to pass for their salvation, but in their unbelief they imposed limitations upon the Divine power. If He could not outshine His bygone marvels and cater for their most exorbitant tastes, why then He was not one whit more resourceful than the gods they had left behind in Egypt. It was just the little bit more they wanted God to do out of the direct line of His purposes, about which their unbelief broke out in such offensive forms.

You are one whom God is covenanted to bring forth from bondage and set amongst the princes of light. High destinies are in store for you, and you must needs believe in God's continuous salvation through every step of your pilgrimage, and let Him shape the plan of it in His own way. Why should your whims and weaknesses and insistencies forsooth be sacred in His sight? Be content to have them set aside. When you believe in God's salvation as it persists through your life and breaks out into floods

of ever-growing illumination, you will find it easier to believe in the history of salvation preserved for us in the sacred book; and mounting those ascents of faith, made ready for your steps, you shall find that nothing is impossible to him that believeth.

Do not set up false standards of salvation, for it is still through stress and pain that men must enter the kingdom. Let God direct your path, for He knows what will suit you best, and do not imagine that caravanserais for God's guests must needs be palaces in which banquets are spread, and that dainty menus are the itineraries on which you can read the stages of your heavenward march. Be shy of the mixed multitude; you and your children will learn bad lessons in their company. Your faith will have its trials, yet be undismayed, for some of the best men of the Bible fell into temporary scepticisms, but they rose above the temptation and the darkness, waxing stronger and stronger in the faith. The scepticisms of the mixed multitude blight and poison and destroy, for those scepticisms are compounded of lustfulness and rebellion. Be separate from sinners and keep the heart pure, for the mistrust which God bans can never thrive in a holy nature. "Take heed lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God."

IV

THE VACILLATIONS OF FAITH

"But let him ask in faith, nothing doubting: for he that doubteth is like the surge of the sea driven by the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive anything of the Lord; a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways."—JAMES i. 6–8.

IN the writings of the Apostle Paul, as well as in the sayings of our Lord Himself, we are reminded of the fact that the faith which achieves great things and uplifts the devout life to the highest excellence set before it, must be an established principle of the soul, and not a passing mood only. James, in his notable Epistle, drives the truth home with a picturesque metaphor which it is almost impossible to forget. The man who asks for wisdom with a faith which is spasmodic only is like the wave of the sea, which may be bent, deflected from its first course, moulded to the contour of any coast on to which it is driven at the will of the storm, sucked back into the sea out of which it came, or shattered into useless spray upon the rocks. The faith which obtains as its recompense the richest gifts must be stedfast, coherent, pertinacious, long-enduring.

In dealing with this vital subject the inspired writer puts us on to clear and indisputable ground

at the outset. He does not discuss prayer in any of its speculative aspects, nor does he admit within the scope of his survey things not in certain accord with the Divine will. For the purpose of enforcing a principle which admits of wider application, he fixes our thought upon one who asks a gift necessary for the perfecting of the Christian character and the complete efficiency of the disciple's appointed round of service. Some Eastern nations have made wisdom a moral rather than an intellectual quality, and found for it an honourable place amongst the cardinal virtues; and perhaps after all they are not far wrong. Vital problems in the Christian life turn upon a fine spiritual discernment and a skilful use of the higher reason, which can neither be taught by the human instructor nor acquired by ordinary training and reflection. The wisdom which regulates character and makes the most of life and its opportunities is the product of prayer and not of temperament or education; and the prevalency of the prayer is conditioned by the stedfast quality of the faith which inspires and upholds it. How easy such faith would be to us if our hearts were not so worldly and evil! What father is there who does not wish his child to be wise, and who is not ready to pay any price so that wisdom may be put within reach of that child as the mind opens to receive it? One of the unchanging certainties upon which we can count is that our Divine Father wishes us to be filled with both wisdom and goodness, and we must acknowledge the fact in a confidence free from every trace of moodiness, instability, fluctuation.

We sometimes get into ways of speaking which seem to imply that it is a momentary act of faith to

which all things are possible, a faith into which we rise by a sudden and desperate leap rather than by force of a habit which is becoming part of the life-long character; and a superficial interpretation of Christ's words may almost seem to justify us in this idea. But we must remember when He speaks of a faith which is apparently insignificant in its dimensions and yet can pluck up trees and hurl mountains into the abyss, He is speaking of what is little on the scale of space rather than of time. He does not compare faith to a flake of fire or a dewdrop or a snow crystal, which pass away in an hour, but to a seed which, though tiny, is vital, and has a term of assured evolution before it. The disciples had many a time done what they now failed to do under the shadow of the holy mount, and they were frustrated at last because their faith had dissipated itself like the surge of the sea, and had not gone on expanding from stage to stage like a living seed. Now the act of faith, and the first act too, may be priceless in value as the foundation of a habit, but an act which stands by itself without any progeny of after-acts, is all but useless and woefully disappointing. The cry of the newborn babe in the childless home is welcome music, but if a long silence follows the first cry the silence becomes more cruel and depressing than aforetime. An infant's first step calls forth as much merriment in the house as a national holiday, but if the first step is all too soon followed by paralysis of the motor centres, the significance of that brave attempt falls into the background. The first step means something if it inaugurates journeys of research in unknown lands, campaigns for the freeing of slaves, long pilgrimages of mercy to prisons, or to

homes which are worse than prisons. We must never allow ourselves to think that it is a thing of no importance if, after the tension of a great effort to believe, we allow ourselves to slip back into moods of indifference and unbelief.

Some insects develop wings for the special migrations they have to undertake at certain seasons of their lives, and then shed their wings when the flight is over, just as quietly as the pilgrim puts aside his staff when he has reached the close of his march. And some of us have ideas of prayer not unlike that. We assume that faith is a passing obligation we have to observe, a formality necessary to the attainment of some benefit, and that when the prescribed condition is once satisfied, God will do the rest. As soon as the objects we seek are coming within the horizon, we grow careless about our responsibility for continuous trust in God's goodwill.

The faith that is *evanescent is an affectation*, and can no more pass as a just constituent of fruitful worship and service than any other kind of vamped-up sentiment. The complete sincerity of faith is proved by its imperturbable persistence. It must spring from the deepest and most enduring part of the personality, and if it do not, a moment's reflection will convince us it must be lacking in genuineness and reality. The wavering faith of the double-minded man is a superficial agitation of the soul. God desires truth in the inward parts, and the truth of our faith is the beginning of every other kind of truth, and the constancy of faith has the nearest possible relation to its truth. The holy place is not a stage upon which we may feign a faith we do not feel and act a miracle-play of the patriarch Abraham, whilst we have the

cold, dead weight of a captious Israelite hanging like a millstone upon the soul. The believe-once-and-have-done-with-it kind of performance God will not have. He is not to be cozened with the trick of the huckster, who puts fair, round, blushing fruit at the top of his hamper, and layers of pitted, shrivelled, and ill-favoured fruit in a deteriorating series right away to the bottom. Hope, faith, and expectation must go with us through the week, and not be displayed in His presence on holy days only, if God is to account our qualities real. Under the stimulus of common worship, and with special inspirations of feeling sweeping through the soul, some of us seem to present to God a fair and beautiful faith, but it does not go through all the segments of the home and business character. It is not the spontaneous expression of regenerated instincts. An unfluctuating faith in God is the fruit of a sincere, believing, oft-tested nature, whose very life-breath it is to trust, and to trust always. As God is a God of truth, and insists upon reality in His worshippers, He must needs have in the man who is to be enriched and ennobled by His chiefest gifts a stable, continuous, unfaltering faith.

Faith means *the deepest thought we have of God*, and when that thought swings from side to side like the pendulum, one moment viewing God as true, benign, compassionate, covenant-keeping, and the next letting Him pass out of sight or viewing Him in more or less contradictory aspects, God is not thought of according to His due. A wavering estimate of God is the chaos out of which railings and blasphemies will take shape at the bidding of the Evil One. If moods seem to seize upon us in spite of all that we can do to repel them, making sport of our

purposes and setting our better selves at defiance, we must at least shut such moods out of the inner citadel of our personality. How impossible home with its sanctities, its serene atmospheres, its coalescent affections, would become, if either party to the marriage contract started out with the idea of fulfilling the vows spoken just as the humour of the hour might dictate! How impossible commercial enterprise would become if those engaged in it entered into their responsibilities with the notion of making their own whims supreme, one day accepting the credit of a friendly firm and the day after withdrawing from it, one day feeling inclined to trust clients wholesale and the day after feeling moved to treat them as a horde of knaves! Who cares for a companion of fickle moods, reticent in the morning and expansive in the evening, one week sweet as honey and the week after bitter as gall, sweeping from equatorial fervours to antarctic frigidity with scarcely a note of warning, like the souls in one of Dante's purgatories? We want something upon which we can always count in cultivating the spirit of fellowship with our kind—habits, settled lines of action, stable qualities of temperament. To believe one hour and disbelieve the next is an affront to the Eternal, for it treats Him as though He were a stupendous Proteus who goes through misleading changes and transformations, pitiful at some epochs of our life and pitiless at others, near when we gather in the temple, far off when we buy and sell in the world, gracious and easy to be intreated on Sundays, phlegmatic and inaccessible Mondays, Tuesdays, Saturdays. We cannot dishonour God more grievously than by often changing the keynote of our thought

and feeling towards Him, and undoing through after-doubt all the glory we paid Him by our former faith. God always has the same title to our trust, and claims to be dealt with either in one way or the other upon perfectly consistent lines.

The faith that is only momentary *cannot satisfy the heart of the Eternal.* The immortality with which He has endued us is the sign that He wants the moral and spiritual qualities which are to thrive in our souls to have the widest possible field for their exercise, and of these qualities faith is the chief and the first-born. The life of some winged insects is said to be measured by the hour only, and, unlike bees and ants, they have no need to lay up food supplies which will last through long wintry months. God does not belong to an order of beings whose requirements can be met by what is transient and volatile, and it is impossible to satisfy His mighty insistency by a mood of faith unstable as the morning dew. It is by permanent ties that God wants to attach us to Himself, and the central strand round which all the other strands weave themselves is faith. He would defeat His own counsels if He were to attach munificent rewards to separate, isolated, incoherent acts of faith, into which minds full of the most heterogeneous sentiments might now and again force themselves. A faith short-lived as a society smile cannot satisfy an age-outlasting God. He is worshipped in heaven with a reverence, a trust and a tender praise that have endured for untold epochs, and the virtues of Christ's oblation were the sweet odours of a love consecrating itself to death before the foundation of the world. It was through the Eternal Spirit that was in Him that He offered Himself without spot to

God. Is it rational to imagine that such a God will be complacent if we bring to His feet a few moments of specially cultivated Sunday or prayer-meeting faith followed by six days of cankering unbelief, indifference, and distraction? We should not regard our children as Heaven's brightest gifts if they trusted us now and again, and the blitheful expectations of returning festivals were exchanged for churlishness, stolidity, and sullen dubitations about our generosity for the rest of the year. Fugitive virtues and affections never content our souls, and we are made in God's image. If a man shows us goodwill we want him to show it through all changes. When he has professed to follow our lead in art, literature, statesmanship, we feel as though we had been stabbed when he forsakes us. And God wants permanent things, settled principles and convictions, mature and unfluctuating habits of soul from us, and can never be pleased if we give Him merely spurts and spasms of faith. We must look as steadily to God as the stars turn their glances of living light towards each other if we are to know the worth and the recompense of prayer.

The blessings we seek in believing supplication are permanent in their duration, and *faith is the condition of their tenure as well as of their first attainment.* "For by faith ye stand." God's best gifts are illimitable in their felicities as the nature from which they come, and it is incredible that a passing faith invalidated and neutralised by afterthoughts of a diverse and opposing order should confer inalienable blessing. In this unstable and contradictory world the precious things at one time received by faith may be temporarily or permanently forfeited by the God-

dishonouring doubt into which a man suffers his soul to settle. In sacred as in secular things it is found that man has been made capable of pulling down as well as of building up, and not infrequently the one faculty cancels and destroys the work of the other. By despondency and impatient unbelief he is able to impoverish and destroy, as well as to work great things by a temper of invincible confidence. Faith in God is the process by which we found, uprear, adorn, and consummate; and doubt, when it is moral in its causes and its dominant disposition, is the revolutionary solvent of all that which we have begun to experience and to achieve in happier stages of our history. Through the collapse of spiritual faith a man may despoil himself and turn the threshold of the mercy-seat into a scene heaped high with the rack and litter of broken tasks and desecrated hopes. God's work in and through us is not effected by a single Divine act, but by a sustained series, and those acts must one and all correspond to the permanent and unresting operations of our faith.

The double-minded man who never knows himself, who has never found out his own equation in spiritual things, who drifts before moods as gaily as the nautilus spreads its painted sails to the winds, who believes when genial influences combine to make it easy so to do, and morbidly disbelieves at the first temptation which comes to test his faith, is a failure as a suppliant and touches the lowest depths of vanity and frustration when he bends the knee in vacuous prayer. The issue may be told beforehand. St. James writes out the verdict upon such weakling worship: "Let not that man think that he shall receive anything of the

Lord." He fluctuates with the unstable world, and can think nothing, feel nothing, achieve nothing that shall forever withstand the drift of its fitful currents.

How may we rid ourselves of variable moods and attain that habit of unwavering faith which makes supplication prevailing? Is it inevitable that we should be the slaves of vacillation and fitfulness?

If we would cherish into an established habit the faith that seeks to spring up and possess our souls *we must never wantonly expose ourselves to influences hostile to faith.* This is a rule which commends itself as soon as stated, and for which it is unnecessary to argue. Our own hearts are miniatures of the world, and till entirely renewed from above are full of pride, selfish, suspicious temper, and sundry promptings to mistrust and distracting fear. Of course we shall vacillate in our faith and believe only by fits and starts, if we measure the goodwill of Him to whom we address our prayers, by the petty scale of moral qualities to be found within ourselves or current in a fickle world. The carnal mind is enmity against God, and the first impulse of one inflamed with antipathy to another is to impeach his fidelity and sow distrust of his character. A bias towards doubt of God is in us by nature, and if we either live within ourselves or cultivate undue intimacy with the world, however high we may seem to attain for a moment through some stimulant administered to our faith, we shall soon be back again on the old levels, perhaps cursed at heart with a more intractable distrust than ever. The idea once current that the mummy wheat found in Egyptian tombs would germinate, has proved to be a fiction, but there is a truth which is stranger than that. The seeds of an unholy scepticism,

planted, it may be, ten thousand years ago, and in some generations all but dormant, are in us, and the evil heart of unbelief often vivifies with surprising rankness and chokes our prayers. The traditions of the world, which is organised and confederated sense-life, deftly as the world may trim its attitudes to the ascendency of Christian ideas, are hostile to faith, and if we wantonly cultivate its unspiritual friendships we shall find the checks upon faith will multiply in an amazing fashion. If I had a bitter and relentless enemy, and you spent three-fourths of your time with that enemy and spoke to me at rare intervals, and then with extreme reserve, it would be a miracle if you were to retain your faith in me and in my character. The friendship of the world is enmity to God, and if your alliance with the world is needlessly close, and you are found loving its glittering scenes and associations more fervently than you love the presence of the Most High, your faith must waver, if indeed it is not overwhelmed and destroyed. The injunction, "Let him ask in faith, nothing wavering," presupposes separation from the world. If our life oscillates between God and the world it is no more possible to maintain an even faith than the man can keep an even bodily temperature who spends his alternate hours at the mouth of a blast furnace and in an ice-house. Not only must we separate ourselves from associations in which a covert distrust of God is the prevailing temper, but we must be much in the company of those who have faith in the truth of God and the virtue of prayer. And, above all, we must draw near to God in the ways appointed for building up faith. Those who are scrupulously honest and unselfish command in their own homes a confidence

which no outside animadversion can disturb. And if we have a constant and first-hand contact with God, that faith in His character which is the mainspring of mighty prayer is not at all likely to hesitate or waver.

The growth of faith into a constant principle is *closely allied to the consolidation of character*, and it is vain to expect from a man of unstable moods and changeful conduct prayers of uniform and resolute confidence. The forces of the personality must be stirred and brought into play, and there must be a dogged setting of oneself to obedience as well as to lifelong trust in those great and precious promises which challenge our faith. In our ocean-going steamers there are racks and compasses so hung that they always keep upright, however much the vessel itself may pitch and roll and quiver with strange convulsions. An attempt was made some years ago to construct a cabin which would remain stable whilst the framework of the boat in which it was pivoted was tossed by the waves. The experiment was no clear success, as far at least as the comfort of the passengers was concerned. The theory is perhaps feasible. But what is conceivable in mechanics is impossible in morals. No art of earth or heaven can construct within a man's soul a faith guaranteed to keep steady and true and victoriously tranquil whilst the other component parts of his character are in a state of hourly flux, disquiet, agitation. If the man in the sum total of his attributes is unfixed, irresolute, moody, changeful, many ups and downs are before his faith, in which the downs will finally rule the situation. He who is capricious and whimsical, never quite sure of his own mind, never heartily on God's side, and never, in his

own estimate at least, on the devil's side, will offer prayers the faith of which will pass through more frequent changes than the moon. A man must be self-consistent, at one with his own heart and judgment, no trimmer, no halter between two opinions, if he is to have faith of this stable and prevailing quality. Decision of character and decision reiterated again and again when symptoms of weakness are still found within us, will master the temptation to waver. But does not this make character the determinating element in faith rather than faith the determining element in character and leave the poor waverer just where he was at the beginning? The two things work together, and react upon each other. If faith is occupied in the hourly sanctification of character it will grow into robustness and be no longer weak, helpless, vacillating, devitalised of courage and assurance when we come before God. It is a part of God's plan that faith should have something to do every day and every hour. It has temptations to conquer, consecration vows to perform, soul-purifying tasks to carry to their grand consummations, and if we keep it in constant exercise we shall not lack this quality of believing stedfastness nor go from our acts of prayer unblessed and unrecompensed.

If our prayers are to be marked by this unswerving and triumphant confidence *strong qualities must go to the making of our faith*, qualities which will stand the strain of waiting and the rebuffs which meet us when we have gone forth to await the fulfilment of our desires. The ingredients which enter into some men's faith are highly volatile in character, and unless well stoppered and carefully sealed swiftly evaporate

without a sign. For some men faith means a docile acquiescence in the teachings of the Church and has no root in the inner personal life. For others it is sentiment of a finely distilled and ethereal order. It is sweet, beautiful, and æsthetic to believe, especially when the heart easily melts and the emotions are warm, and the tides of feeling all run in one direction, and that towards glowing horizons. But something sterner than this must enter into the tissues of our faith. Feeling runs in eddies, and eddies have a trick of floating us back again and again to our starting-point and so mocking the promise of progress. In bridging great rivers engineers have sometimes found themselves confronted by stretches of shifting sand in which they could not get a foundation for the piers; until at last one or two projecting rocks were discovered under the quicksands strong enough to bear the massive towers and buttresses needed to uphold through every tempest a giant fabric of steel. Is it really hopeless for us to discover unchanging attributes in the personality, that will stand stedfast in the whirlpool of fickle thoughts and the ebb and flow and incalculable drift of treacherous moods?

Such an attribute is *conscience, less mutable by far than other parts of man's being.* God's breath is in it, and the breath of One in whom there is no variation neither shadow cast by turning, protects this faculty from the weaknesses of its kindred faculties. The testimony of the conscience has been consistent and sustained from our infancy till now, and any slight changes we imagine are due entirely to the growth of the intellectual powers which interpret and apply its

axioms and not to any rectification of the early message. The witness inwardly borne to the first simple principles of right is the same in the cave-man and in the man who is the finest product of modern knowledge and civilisation, the same at the Equator and within the Arctic circle. The conscience must contribute the foundation elements to faith, and such faith will be as little subject to change or deflection or variability as this Divine faculty itself. It is a part of the categorical imperative to believe in God, in His complete generosity of character, in His tender, all-ruling love ; and this principle of right which must settle our attitude of soul towards God is eternal and cannot be subject to change. This Divine sense infixed within us must also be used to test and adjudge and approve the fitness of the things for which we pray. If the sense of right is the germinal force within our faith, throbbing through all our believing struggles, if it forces upon us the resistless urgency of the obligation to confide in God's truth and power without a fear, our faith will rise above many of the weaknesses which have unnerved it in the past and wrecked its aims. Let us make it a conscience to believe that God will not deny us any of the right and profitable things we ask in our prayers, and so shall we escape the sentence of failure James pronounces upon the unstable man. And in the best sense of the word *reason must also enter into our faith* if it is to escape the reproach of fitfulness. Reason never changes, although the statements with which reason deals are subject to correction, for they sometimes rest upon a careless statement of fact or a misleading use of the observing senses. A syllogism is just as true for the man as for

the child, for the last age of the world as for the first. Pure reason is as eternal as God Himself, in whose bosom it is nurtured. We must be intelligently persuaded of the Fatherhood of God and of His sovereignty in human affairs. If we see that no other theory of history is worth thinking about than that an unseen hand is ever present to shape, to chastise, to uplift, to direct to far-off goals, our faith will acquire stability, for reason in its purest essence is changeless, and that which is inconstant and admits correction is the counterfeit of reason. And then when the conscience and the judgment are assured concerning the great hearer of prayer and the fitness of the things for which we ask, we must put into our prayers that *power of will* which is one of the most distinctive attributes of our being, and thus will the undivided and coherent man be made to pray. There is a holy as well as a rebellious wilfulness, and one cannot but feel that some of the Old Testament incidents in which man is portrayed as though he had higher and more merciful ideals than God and succeeded in overbearing His counsels of judgment, were intended to teach us the possibilities of holy wilfulness. Indeed that is the obvious point in several of our Lord's parables, and it can only be taught by methods that give us a little shock of surprise. Elijah prevails through his indomitable pertinacity. We see him bowing himself in prayer for the priceless rains, whilst the Levant simmers at his feet like a sea of fire; and the hot, coppery sky is blinking over his fevered head, a paralysis meanwhile gripping universal life as though it were the moment of suspense preceding the opening of the last judgment. Six times does he send his servant, and six times does

that servant return without reporting a sign. No unstable man that, for his faith does not pause or halt. One feels that he is the same strong personality in dealing with God as in reckoning with false prophets and renegade kings, and that there is a prodigious degree of inspired wilfulness in his faith. When our reason and our conscience are assured, let us so set our wills that they shall never move, and God Himself will invigorate those wills and fortify them to unbending strength.

The things into which God comes are always stable. The system of nature is stable, because God is immanent there. The Jewish temple was stable whilst it enshrined God, and tottered to its overthrow only when He had forsaken it. And God is pre-eminently present in the conscience, in the reason when it is separate from pride, in the will which firmly sets itself to all which the conscience and reason have judged to be in harmony with God's counsels. And if God, in manifestations of growing vividness and power, comes into our life day by day, our faith will become stable as God's throne. Realise that it is the highest form of both right and reason to trust God, and faith will become one of the enduring realities of your being, and not the vagrant, wind-chased ripple of a moment. The more of God there is in our faith and in those attributes of our personality which are enlisted in the production of faith, the less will our faith vary, for it will share in some degree the essential immutabilities of the Divine character. Those means of grace which quicken and establish our sense of God's indwelling presence contribute most effectually to the impregnable stability of our faith.

If moral qualities be at the very centre of our faith

the moods which baffle and distract us will tend to come under more perfect control, and by and by we shall be subject to fewer fluctuations of feeling than in the past. Astronomers tell us that the reason the moon has no atmosphere is that its mass is not sufficiently great to bind swiftly moving gases into attachment to it by the force of gravity. It seems scarcely possible either for any of the smaller bodies in the sky above us to have atmospheres. There are no molecules of free hydrogen in our own atmosphere, because these molecules move with a velocity which tends to take them beyond the range of the earth's attraction. On the other hand, the vast mass of the sun enables it to hold to itself many of the lighter and more impetuous gases which could not be retained in our own atmosphere. If at the very heart of our faith there be vast moral principles, if we pray under convictions which are at once solid and momentous, if the measureless attributes of our personality come into play to inform our faith, we may hope to find our moods less volatile than in the past and to bind about ourselves atmospheres of rare emotion which will be on the side of faith. It is well when feeling helps faith, but faith must be duty and principle first and feeling afterwards, or it can never become one of our settled and established habits. If the faith which is in us is unstable as drifted sand or volcanic ash it will be a poor fulcrum when we set ourselves to the task of moving mountains.

"Behold, as the eyes of servants look unto the hand of their masters, and as the eyes of a maiden unto the hand of her mistress ; so our eyes wait upon the Lord our God."

V

PRAYER AND TEMPERAMENT

"Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain; and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain and the earth brought forth her fruit."—JAMES v. 17, 18.

THE writer of the Book of Kings tells us nothing whatever of the earlier prayer mentioned by St. James which brought this terrible drought upon Ahab and his corrupt people. He only describes the scene on Mount Carmel when the prophet bowed his head between his knees, and awaited the rain which was to end the distress and be a token of new mercy to the rebellious land. James, of course, had authority for affirming that drought, no less than rain, was the result of the prophet's pleadings. It may be that when Elijah was divinely appointed to his task, like Moses at the bush, he desired a sign which would ensure a hearing for his message. Not for the credit of his own name did the prophet ask this, but lest his protest should otherwise prove itself empty and unavailing. Perhaps it was through some Divine intimation that he learned how nothing less than this visitation of blackened herbage, decimated flocks and tormenting heat would bring home to the people a

sense of their sin in departing from the living God. At the cost of flocks and herds and dearth the purity of religion must be vindicated. And thus, taught by God, this man of iron prays that a scourge may come upon the people which will compel them to listen to his protest and recover them at last to Jehovah's service. Then, when the drought has done its work and the test of Carmel has vindicated God's claim, the prayer of this self-same man proves itself a key which can open as well as close the gates of heaven.

It was in no spirit of revenge the prophet prayed, and he was not the pitiless herald of vengeance we sometimes paint him. He knew that God's mercy had not clean gone for evermore, that a term had been put to this consuming terror, and that men needed to be heartened by hope as well as shocked out of their insensate folly by fear. In a few brief hours the heavens gather with tumult like the roar of battle. For judgment and for mercy alike this solitary voice is heard before God. He prayed again and the heavens gave forth rain and the earth smiled, as in its guileless infancy, with beauty and with fruitfulness. And what is more remarkable still and the point of emphasis in the text, this man was of the same stock with ourselves, compounded of the same clay, beset with the same infirmities, vexed, wearied, held down by the same passions.

Many recent books have been written to cheer those who are not born to fortune. Young men are invited to read short lives of poets, inventors, naturalists, merchants who struggled against depressing odds and at last succeeded in making themselves famous. By dint of industry, patience, self-denial,

they passed out of obscurity and won for themselves names that will be cherished for centuries. Such books do good, and have their part in stimulating the social progress of thousands. Now and again they lead, perhaps, to a little hurtful romance and castle-building, but they save many from despair. It is a fact needing to be stoutly enunciated that the humblest are free to rise. Poor, unfriended youths must be told again and again that study, diligence, prompt habits, the observant eye, may be better than the best fortune. In a free country where opportunities lie ready to hand no disability is fatal. And in the verse before us James seems to follow a parallel method for religious ends. Elijah was a rough countryman with no advantage of position, temperament, training, that can put him into a different category from ourselves. It is not genius or supernatural gift or deep discernment which contributes the essential qualities of prevailing prayer. God's answer will come to the persistent and unwearied soul everywhere, however many the infirmities which beset, and all the factors of Elijah's success in pleading with God lie within the circle of our own experience. The drawbacks of human passion need not keep us out of God's presence chamber, and in conquering ourselves we shall prevail with God. The searcher of hearts alone knows how much stood in this man's way. The sun and the wind in which he lived tended to help the flesh to tyrranous health rather than the spirit to fine sense and rare discernment. His early lot was cast far off from the centre of orthodox worship, and we have no proof that he ever visited that centre. But Abel, Enoch, Abraham, Moses, Jacob, in common with this

Tishbite, had to make their own shrines and find God where best they could. The great intercessors of the Bible were not always or even often priests, and wonderful prayers were answered outside the temple precincts. These glorious suppliants had to handle the same everyday interests, and were sometimes submerged by the same tumults of the mind as ourselves. They prevailed, having little to help them; and the fact that the Bible should record their histories proves that God expects the same results to be achieved in the common world as long as the Bible is read. There is equal privilege and equal possibility for all in the kingdom of God.

It is perhaps our temptation to think that there can only be effectual, much-availing prayer where there is some rare gift of temperament or fine spiritual endowment that at the outset differentiates from the common crowd. What an encouragement it is to remember these words, and especially when we consider the source from which they come—James, the brother of our Lord. Such assertions are expected from St. Paul, because his own early history was humiliating, and the doctrine of God's impartial and world-embracing love had necessarily come to have a foremost place in His creed. The grace that had reached this man of Tarsus, not only making him an apostle, but with strange heedfulness attending to his lifelong prayers, is manifestly the common inheritance of all. Such a one was providentially fitted to be the preacher and advocate of equal religious privilege. Indeed his message was involved in his commission to be a prophet of the Gentiles. "There is no difference" is an axiom which occurs again and again in his

teaching, and which condemns the partitions put up between individuals just as firmly as those between races. "The same Lord is rich unto all that call upon Him" is the bed-rock truth in half His theology. But James had passed through a different history, and might have been expected to accentuate a different phase of the gospel teaching. To assert the equality of every servant of the Most High before the mercy-seat must have run counter to the traditions of his own birth, training, history. Such views traversed the prepossessions of his chief friends and contemporaries. It is a surprise to find James boldly affirming that degrees of religious privilege and possibility do not vary, for he is reputed to have maintained the strictest practice of Jewish ordinances to the very end of his career. And his relationship to our Lord associated him with a group of men to whom there was a disposition to pay the highest possible honour. He might have put on the airs of a spiritual sovereign and lived like an august pontiff in solitary state; and such a course would have commended itself to many of the communities bearing Christ's name. And yet, Nazarite though he was in habit and half-brother to the Lord Himself in blood, he not only helped to free the Gentiles from the Jewish yoke, but in the verse before us proclaims to all generations the equality of inheritance for every sincere soul in the kingdom of God.

This is one of the ruling ideas of the Epistle, and is applied to the outward incidents of worship as well as to its innermost privilege and hope. In the second chapter James denounces the social distinctions that sometimes crept into the synagogue, for he was grieved to see the poor man with patched and faded

abba sitting at the footstool of the rich. He who wore the gold chain and the costly apparel had not been more lavishly ransomed by the cross nor was his heart the home of more potent prayer. The man relegated to the meanest place might be one of the princes of heaven with a tender soul, a royal sympathy, a victorious faith, a free friendship with God, and surpass in true spiritual rank the chiefs of the synagogue. Whilst penning this protest against deference to the rich and disrespect to the poor, and affirming that common clay is no barrier to the highest achievements of faith, did James recall his own youthful days at Nazareth? It is easy to imagine that he thought of a synagogue on the hillside, in which the world's greatest benefactor endured contempt because He was an artisan and belonged to a family of little apparent status, each member of which was named with an accent of contempt; and it may be that after James recovered from that wavering of allegiance and faith to which he was provoked by these haughty sneers, he resolved that if he could do anything to prevent it, this old scene of class distinctions in the synagogue should never be reproduced in the new dispensation that was dawning upon the world. The outward arrangements of worship must not disguise the fact that every man is equal before God. And then in the last words of the Epistle this principle is applied to the inner mysteries of prayer. Elijah himself can have no outstanding throne in the holy place, and we may meet him as an equal. If he surpasses us, it is not because he belongs to a superior order of beings, but because he was true to God at all costs, and *would* make his voice heard, as he made it heard also in the ear of

Ahab. A greater than Elijah, who was always heard, was compassed about with infirmities of flesh and blood, and it may be that James himself did not at the beginning see the efficacy of those most wonderful prayers, because they came from the lips of one who had played like any other lad on the hills of Nazareth, and who had his share of the family passions, although those passions were always under perfect control. And it was doubtless in the name of Him who was "made like unto His brethren in all things" that James proclaimed to all His followers the common possibilities of prayer. The downweight of the flesh sometimes disheartens us; but those whose prayers have most helped to shape God's counsels had the same constitutional drawbacks to reckon with.

This incident belongs to what we are now pleased to call the prescientific age. The difficulties which address us, and under which we lie as helpless as under an incubus of upturned mountains, could scarcely have occurred in the same form to the inspired writers. These words assume God's power as the hearer of prayer over all the forces of the firmament.

Alas! for us nowadays *the message of science is often used to check man's inclination to pray.* It is a current axiom that natural law is unalterable. Those appointed to voice the supplications of the Church and to teach truth that should stimulate men to come before God, sometimes declare that prayer is a spiritual force, and nothing more; and to expect it to do anything besides purify the heart of the suppliant is sheer fanaticism. Prayers like Elijah's for rain or sunshine, litanies deprecating plague, pesti-

lence or sudden death, are mistaken. But men with such a gospel are like nipping winds from the Arctic ice, and freeze devotion at its very sources, rather than a breath of Spring stealing into hearts that are doubt-bound and incapable of prayer. They lock the only gate open to the weary in sickness, distress, and surging storm, and fling the key into the abyss. When the efficacy of prayer is controverted by those who are wise perhaps in their own particular spheres, we wonder that men should continue to pray at all, and can only explain it by the truth that an unseen power constrains, and the inward whisper of God never ceases to invite and persuade. The God of the prophets puts His Spirit into us, and will not suffer us to rest outside the sanctuary of His presence.

The dogma that we are shut in by a physical order which cannot change is partly an abstract proposition, and in our ignorance of many of its concrete applications we still have latitude for our prayers. The weather forecasts of our daily papers are far from infallible. The diagnosis of the doctor sometimes errs. The march of the plague cannot always be foretold, and the course taken by disease is sometimes erratic and determined by causes that lie beyond our knowledge. The assumption that physical law runs counter to many things solicited in our most fervent prayers is premature, and implies that there can only be one issue to some particular conjunction of circumstances in our lives. Before laying down such a discouraging dictum as that, it might be well for us to wait till the fine ramifications and interdependencies of physical law have been more completely tracked out. What is physical law? In what specific sphere does it so operate as

to preclude modification, mutual check, overruling sovereignty? Is it in the sphere of organic life? The evolutionist, whilst holding fast to the theory that the laws which are at the foundation of life never change, at the same time asserts that out of an invariable law we get a variable effect. If it were not so the speck of protoplasm must always remain what it was at the beginning, and could never rise into winged fowl or sagacious beast. Is it in the celestial firmament that law so reigns as to exclude adaptation and change? The orbits of the planets are never the same. The balance of attraction is subject to so many subtle disturbances that for the past half-million years the earth has never kept precisely the same pathway round the sun. Its orbit is pulled lengthwise and breadthwise and cornerwise into different shapes, in some cases by the influence of bodies invisible to us. Is it in the atmosphere around us that rigid laws yield issues so uniform as to mock all prayer? Perhaps the calculations of science are more completely baffled here than in any field. The study of cyclones, anticyclones, barometric pressures and their complex combinations, is the last-born of the sciences which is not meet to be called a science, and it is this particular infant which is introduced to us as the prodigy which is even now strangling the old superstition of prayer.

The Pacific Railway was once represented by a single pair of metals. The passing of the trains must have presented curious problems to the Indian who first watched them. His first supposition would be that the rails could only bear the engines and cars in one particular direction. If they rushed at the same time both towards the sunrise and the sunset they

must surely annihilate each other more utterly than tribes at war. And an interpreter might state puzzle after puzzle till the Indian would be distracted and incredulous. The train which passed at day-dawn was an emigrant train, and would reach the sea in eight days; the train passing at noon was an express, and would reach the same goal in six days; and that passing at sunset with one saloon car only, carried a railway king, and would reach the Pacific coast in three days. How can that be? Will the one run the other down, or will the trains chasing each other leap over one another's backs and alight unhurt? It is impossible. The book giving the times of arrival is full of white man's fables. But beyond the range of the poor Indian's hunting ground there are loops and sidings, points and junctions, and these discrepant and incredible results are brought about by the control exercised there. It is only the man born and schooled in a wigwam who judges the whole railway system by the little section over which his two eyes can range.

And is Nature constructed upon a clumsier system than that? Are its laws single tracks running on through illimitable ages without points, junctions, adjustments? Are we face to face with a group of cast-iron necessities which allow of no mutual subordinations? We know that it is not so. One physical law is sometimes subjected to another, and all bow together to God's interpretation of the moral interests of the universe. God could not so arrange the mechanisms of lifeless matter as to make them involve the negation of man's fellowship with Himself. He at least does not make His children pass through the fire to the Moloch of an immutable physical

order. The New Testament restates the witness of the Old to the supreme power of prayer. Do not let us be so foolish and narrow as to judge things from the little section of law we can see, as we stand within the circumscribed reservations that bound our goings-out and our comings-in.

It is well for us to face boldly the daily question that is before us. If prayer cannot be answered God is a force and nothing more, and moral motives are in His esteem trifling as the fine summer dust which settles upon the crank of the engine, without checking its movement. If prayer cannot be answered moral motives are accidents in the life of the universe, and not its deep animating principles. If prayer cannot be answered stern physical expediencies, outweigh in God's eternal counsels, the most sacred interests of character. If prayer cannot be answered the doctrine of God's Fatherhood becomes obsolete, for a father could scarcely build up a steel-prison structure of cosmic law which leaves no room for heart of tenderness to pulsate under its framework, no inch of play for a free and gentle hand of help. If his infinite compassions can be immured in a stony order he is the one being in the universe most to be pitied. He who in some realm beyond the survey of our senses subjects one physical law to another, surely subjects all physical to that moral law which is the essence of his own character, and must ever be paramount in its significance. In praying for temporal things we cannot always judge whether God's highest counsels will be thereby advanced, but we may be sure the order of the universe can present no obstruction to the answer of a prayer which is in unison with the Divine wisdom and

holiness. When Elijah pleaded the issues involved were of more account than the laws which had determined the succession of sun and rain from the beginning. He bore upon His heart the burdens of a backsliding nation; yea, in some degree, perhaps, the religious destinies of mankind.

But *the moral difficulties that threaten to thwart our prayers are more stupendous and appalling than those suggested by the study of natural law.* It is these which St. James has in view in the text before us. He is looking at prayer in its relation to human character rather than as it concerns the established order of the physical universe. Our own antecedent unworthiness to be heard and answered, is the supreme problem that troubles us as we come before God. This inspired writer tells us that the problem is not intractable. It has been solved in the prevailing supplications of men who are compounded of kindred elements. The prophet of Carmel had that same underlying oneness of temperament with us out of which come hindrances and infirmities.

In heartening ourselves by this thought let us not assume that the efficacy of prayer is independent of all moral factors. There must be a core of genuine righteousness within us if our cries are to be heeded. An unholy man is almost sure to pray for wrong things, and even when he prays for what is right, God cannot put distinction upon his prayers by connecting Divine gifts with such supplications. To the pleadings of a nature set in transgression God must ever be deaf. "If I regard iniquity in my heart the Lord will not hear me." Sin separates more hopelessly than the seas, and makes prayer as

unavailing as the cry of a child to a helper whose ship has sunk below the horizon line.

And infirmities of the flesh not involving actual sin hinder prayer, although the obstruction they offer is not insuperable. The passions that work within us threaten to weaken and even to quench the higher and better desires that God approves. They absorb the forces that nourish our supplications. It is no easy thing for us, hemmed in as we are by the limitations of the dust out of which we have been shaped, to keep alive the high motives which incite and energise to unceasing importunacy. The wings of prayer are so weighted by the senses and appetites, that we resign ourselves to the life of the earth, rather than soar into the upper spheres, and the wings are in peril of atrophy. The downweight of the physical life makes supplication a weariness and a failure. Passion is not sin, but it is near akin to it, and we fear lest God should not hear us. Can the prayer of one prevail, who cries to God out of an environment of physical frailty and fleshly limitation? The worshipper in Japanese temples, after signalling his attendance to the god by gong or bell, sucks in his breath before presenting his request. He considers it disrespectful to breathe upon his god. And the passions that cleave to us often make us feel like that in presence of the Most Holy. Our breath seems to have an ethical taint in it, and we fear lest we should be cast out.

Yet where there is no conscious or deliberate iniquity, the sense we have of our humanness and imperfection must not be allowed to fetter and dishearten us. Neither physical law on the one hand nor constitutional frailty on the other, can frustrate

the power of prayer. At this crisis in the religious history of Israel it was not an unsoiled and passionless angel who was sent to Gilead and Carmel so that his marvellous prayers might guide the pathway of God's judgment. It was a rude Tishbite who, by persistent fervour and earnestness, made himself one with the counsels of the Eternal. His feat of faith was not a sequence of his prophetic office or a miracle which was the adjunct of his special inspiration. These were effects rather than the cause of his prevailing prayer. His grand victories were achieved under the conditions that invest and environ us.

The materials at hand for a complete reconstruction of the character of Elijah are slight, but we cannot read far in the story without finding out how, in spite of his singular gifts and peculiar vocation, he had much in common with ourselves. When death took away the son of the widow in whose house he had been sheltered, he ventures to upbraid God with the petulance of a spoilt child. He had a pretty gift of satire, and enjoyed railing at the priests of Baal just as much as an unbelieving wag enjoys being funny at the expense of the priest who has got into the same railway carriage. A strain of fierceness seems to enter into his slaughter of the false prophets. It may be he thinks nothing less than the blood of his adversaries will propitiate an incensed God. He, at least, could not believe that the judgment of wrath would end whilst Jezebel's regiments of deceivers were flaunting themselves at court. And when Jezebel threatened, her message found him in a state of collapse. He trembles at the thought of his own daring, and, haunted by many misgivings, he speeds into the far-off recesses of the wilderness.

And there he passes a disparaging judgment both upon himself and the worth of the reformation he has inaugurated. Outwearied by strain and sick with hope deferred he asks to die, and that prayer, unlike its predecessors, was not answered because God had something better in store for himself and his country. The service in which he was engaged seems to have lost its charm, for he is tempted to love success like the rest of us, and for the moment he swerves from his allegiance to the unseen. When the Bible paints him with his warts, it is to save us from discouragement and despair. It is easy for a shrewd analysis to bring into view many a foible and failure. He was not always consistent. He has the strength and the weakness of a man impulsive by the innate qualities of his blood. He is cast in the same mould as Simon Peter, but has less of the sociable and tender in his constitution. We can watch the ferment of natural passion working within him, and it is perhaps a discovery to find how much the inner fibres of the man are akin to our own. Whatever the cause for the triumph of his prayer it was not consistent, well-sustained, all-round evenness of feeling and of life. He had just as many ups and downs of temperature, as many fevers, shiverings, intermittencies, as many moods and tenses as the most sensitive of us. He belongs to the same company, travels to his goals by the same pathways, and when he prevails in prayer, prevails in spite of the same drawbacks.

In the fulness of God's grace and compassion *all drawbacks of temperament and character have been already reckoned with.* If the least uprising of passion is fatal to prayer God must needs cut men

off from all communion with Himself. A child may be peevish, irritable, petulant, but the father does not hold himself justified for such reasons in neglecting the little one's cry when needs arise and vast fears haunt the soul. He keeps his ear open and his hand ready to succour, because he is father, and not because the child is already a paragon of virtue, an object-lesson of consummate behaviour, a specimen of youthful piety out of a story-book. If fatherhood listened only to the voice of immaculate childhood we should need to go further afield for illustrations of the prayer-hearing God. By the many patient generosities of fatherhood the child will one day be made ashamed of its petty passions, and be brought up to the ideal of filial devotion; but that would never come to pass if the father disregarded every cry symptomatic of weakness, ill-humour, infirmity. It is to a throne of mercy we come, not to a throne about which the unsullied angels of light cluster,—and this means creatures of passion may draw near. When appetite triumphed in Adam, and he fell, God did not condemn him thenceforth to the privations of practical atheism, but renewed his right of approach to the holy presence by sacrifice, for was he not still a son of God? And the help offered to faith by sacrifice under the old covenant answered its end, so that blemished and ignoble men had power with God as princes, and prevailed—prevailed in spite of the flesh. When you assume that frailties may thwart your prayers, and that no great victory of intercession is possible, have you not forgotten that God answers prayer not as a tribute to human impeccability, but for the honour of His own name, and according to the riches of His grace in

Christ Jesus? Do not discount the worth of prayer, for God has reckoned from the beginning with the part of the question that depresses and dismays you. Human frailty is presupposed in the primary conditions of prayer. Under the new covenant we find that faint, halting, unworthy prayers are helped by a double mediation—the mediation of a Priest who is touched with the feeling of our infirmities, and the mediation of a Spirit who tarries in our hearts to help us against ourselves. Do not be cast down. The largest victories of prayer have been won in face of weakness and limitation, and in the very act of listening to our cries God Himself will deal with our passions of flesh and blood. Elijah was as human as the rest of us, and perhaps started from lower levels of religious training.

And Peter, the chief pillar of the apostolate, is just as clear as James in asserting the common privilege of God's people when they appear as suppliants in His presence. He addresses his second Epistle "To them that have obtained a like precious faith with us in the righteousness of our God and Saviour Jesus Christ." There was nothing unique or officially distinctive in his faith or in that of his immediate comrades, for it did not rest upon personal merit or miraculous endowment, but took its rise "in the righteousness of our God and Saviour"—the common standing ground of all disciples. The prevailing principle in faith is determined by no ethical attribute of our own, but by something in God upon which we have learned to take hold. It is the same kind of faith which is imparted to all the subjects of Christ's kingdom, just as it is the same kind of gold that issues from the Mint to form the currency of the

nation. The Master of the Mint does not put gold of rarer fineness into the duke's sovereign than into the labourer's, and the coin has the same purchasing power whatever the colour of the hand that holds it. It is the name at the foot of the cheque which gives it value when passed over the counter of the bank, and he is a poor simpleton indeed who imagines that the cheque for a sum in four figures will be dishonoured unless he drive there in carriage and pair. And yet some of us are just as whimsical and uninformed upon the subject of prayer. We assume that God will respond more richly and readily to the supplications of prophets, apostles, famous saints, those who belong to brilliant spiritual hierarchies, than to yours and mine. Prayer becomes priceless through the name in which it is presented, however poor and mean and ignoble the petitioner himself. It is "in the righteousness of God our Saviour" that we acquire this faith which is of equal value in every age and place. And in the presence of the infinitely holy, after all what a slight difference there is between God's least faithful servant and the most ethereal of the prophets? Such distinctions are scarcely counted by the prayer-hearing God, for our best desires are fulfilled in the name of His Son, and that His glory may be displayed. In the process of prayer the very passions that seem to have constituted a bar to our prevalency are destroyed, and the prayer that God answers wondrously always proves a victory over self and a constraining act of consecration to His service.

Paul never looked upon himself as a mahatma or a demigod, because he had been called to the apostleship by miracle, and had now and again seen amazing

visions. To the people of Lystra he spoke of himself and his companions as "men of like passions with themselves," and they were wild, riotous, impulsive beyond the common rule. He would have lost his faith and the power attending it, perhaps beyond recovery, if he had accepted the honour that was about to be thrust upon him. He asserted again and again this doctrine of spiritual equality, and would concede nothing to the very chief apostles. And with touching impartiality he applies the same principle to those who are upon a lower plane of religious life and experience than himself. The great and holy man who had been caught up into the third heaven, and heard unspeakable things which it is not lawful for man to utter, the evangelist to whom the Western world was to owe its Christian faith, this master apostle of heroic and outstanding personality, casts himself upon the prayers of Churches whose life was at a comparatively low ebb and whose members were not entirely worthy of their vocation. Perhaps he would never have been able to attach such importance to the supplications of people whose conduct sometimes had a seamy side to it, had he not been privileged to ascend in a transient rapture to the upper world. The Church at Rome was made up of a heterogeneous multitude, and the Epistle addressed to it had many messages of rebuke. There were rifts caused by private misunderstanding and strife. Little respect was shown to the scruples of the weak, and the more progressive brethren were apt to ride roughshod over the sensibilities of those who were tradition-bound. Some found in the new doctrine of grace a temptation to continue in sin that grace might abound. Yet Paul feels that he may be helped by these erring

people, and asks them to "strive with him together in their prayers." And it was the same with the Church at Thessalonica. The doctrine of the second coming had been perverted, and there were thriftless and lazy and even dishonest people in the Church, and yet in spite of these flagrant imperfections Paul felt it was well to lay himself and his work upon their hearts—" Brethren, pray for us." A further illustration occurs in the Church at Colosse, "Withal praying for us also." And yet the rudiments of the world had not been entirely cast off; and there were signs of an intellectual flightiness which threatened to make them victims of the pomposities of the sophists. The prayers of those who had frailties and limitations might be of the highest conceivable value. And it must ever be so if prayer is answered through grace. A recrudescent Pharisaism is at work within us when we dispute the equal possibilities of prayer, and we limit the Holy One of Israel if we make either our own temperaments or the constitutional infirmities of our neighbours the bounds beyond which prayer cannot be efficacious.

VI

ORDER AND STEDFASTNESS

"Joying and beholding your order and the stedfastness of your faith in Christ."—COL. ii. 5.

A SCENE in which the virtues of order and stedfastness are presented to the eye always awakens some throb of pleasure in the observer, whatever the ends to which they may be made to contribute. Those who loathe war and its associations find it quite a delight to watch a review or a series of manœuvres; for to link together into one harmonious whole a vast variety of individual movements seems a splendid feat of skill. Men and women with no mechanical training will spend hours in watching machinery in motion; they are fascinated by the wonderful subjection of part to part, the combined activities of springs, levers, cranks, wheels, a multiplex co-operation that is never at fault. A large household in which each member knows his place and work, and where mutual adaptations are everywhere present is a temple of magic in which sordid economies pass into artistic rhythm. Without noise, effort, or bustle, every task is carried through to perfection. It is a pleasant holiday for some people to walk through a public institution and see how each attendant, official,

inmate, performs his appointed part like clockwork. Half the pleasure felt by the student of science arises from the wonderful order he sees Nature maintaining in the realms he investigates.

And closely allied to this pleasure is that which we experience in contemplating stedfastness and the objects that are the symbols of it. We like to see a man stand his ground even if he does not belong to our side. As we watch the behaviour of the great ship in the swirling trough of the sea our breast swells with pride. The strength of a bridge, such as that which spans the Forth, or the imperturbable massiveness of a lighthouse over whose coping-stone the sea spray flies, makes us feel that we belong to a race of demigods. Such things seem to be the monuments of great moral qualities.

But when order and stedfastness are found in the spiritual spheres, and promise achievements of imperishable value, the joy of all good men in these things is great indeed. Such was the apostle's joy over the Church at Colosse. Though ritual was making its plausible appeal to the senses, and grotesque forms of speculative mysticism were in the air, the Church firmly and valiantly maintained its first faith in Christ.

The Greek word for order is of military origin, and denotes the skilful grouping of well-drilled soldiers into faultless formation for battle, or the chosen positions for attack or defence into which a line of warships has been brought. The term is then used in its secondary stage to describe the organisation of the state, the discipline and economy of the home, and the system that rules a wisely planned life.

Order may arise either through the exercise of

official authority or through hearty and spontaneous allegiance to common principles of action. A French writer has said, "The world is governed by two things—by force and right; by force first till the world becomes ready for right." In some cases it may be necessary for the ruler of a state to create or to restore order by peremptory and high-handed methods. Perhaps it is true that the moral tone of some races is so low that it seems a public duty to awe by terrorism, and the towns and villages in which such races live become little better than cages of wild beasts cowed by the quick eye and the terrible scourge of a despotic keeper; but that is a condition of things of which we do not like to think. We desire rather the order that springs up out of genial affinities and instinctive attractions; some such force of pervading gentleness as that which silently builds the atoms around us into life and harmony. The attempt to create order in the Christian communities of the present day by the fiat of an ecclesiastic, is about as sane as to deal with a national strike by flourishing in the air the seal-ring of a mummied Pharaoh; and the misguided man who makes the experiment finds that he produces not order but disaffection and paralysis. In the government of the Christian Church brute force, however disguised and attenuated, should never be necessary, and it is a question whether the semblance of order so produced can have any value in the view of the great Head of the Church. The Divine purpose is to produce the maximum of order with the minimum of human dictation and interference. It is assumed that every disciple of Christ will be inwardly prompted to recognise the fitnesses and expediencies of Christian

service, and that obedience to common principles in our Church life will bring about method, order, smooth-running and effectual organisation.

The virtue commended by the apostle is social in the sphere of its manifestations, but *it must obviously have its beginnings in the inner discipline of the individual.* Self-rule is the parent virtue of that gracious temper of order which is a mark of the true Church of Jesus Christ. No drill-master, however gifted, can tutor a squad of epileptics into the smooth, machine-like movement of a crack regiment. The several notes of an instrument must be brought into accord with each other before the instrument itself can be brought into common pitch with an orchestra. So the freaks, deflections, untutored impulses which sometimes mar a godly man at the beginning of his career, must be toned down and removed before he can further the common order necessary in the fellowship of Christ's work. The cultivation of personal piety is too often slipshod, easy-going, unsystematic, a question of the exigency of the moment; and whilst that is so we cannot contribute much to the method, harmony, and concerted action which should characterise Christian service and ministration. The truth that God is so eager to save becomes a temptation to us, and we scarcely feel it necessary to follow up for ourselves well-weighed plans for working out that salvation. We are less far-sighted, punctilious, unswerving in our methods than if we had resolved to win a gold medal for scholarship or make the trade of some particular district our own. We assume that the highest benefits of religion can come to us haphazard. Our pursuit of the chief good is too much of a

chance, a jumble, an amiable anarchy. We do not map out our life and perform its duties by conscientious rule. Seasons of private prayer, the little spaces of time that should be given up to Bible reading, the work that God, by the hand and voice of the Church, may have put upon us, are set aside at the mood or convenience of the passing moment; and when that is the case there must be more or less of dissonance in our religious history. We are not undeviatingly methodical. We have conquered our baser passions, but we still allow ourselves to drift on the cross-currents of wandering moods. Trifles dominate the programme of the day and duties seem to come upon us pell-mell and crowd each other out, the sum total of result being chaos and distraction. There is no method, no arrangement, no subordination of the less to the greater, and for some even who bear the Christian name life tends to become a fortuitous medley of ill-defined pieties. But if God comes fully into the soul, chaos will depart and order begin.

It is a much more difficult task to create order amongst living than amongst dead things. The action of wind, tide, and wave will arrange pebbles and seaweed and drift-wood into undulating lines and patterns along the shore, and these inanimate objects will maintain for years the groupings into which they have been thrown. It needs uncommon tact and persuasiveness to arrange restless children into lines and squares and circles, for they are itching to break up again as fast as they have been grouped. It was a tribute to the patience and quiet authority of the disciples as well as to the overpowering personality of the Master who directed them, that they should

have got four thousand hungry, irritable, pushing men, women, and children to seat themselves upon the grass in a precise formation that almost suggested the parterres of a flower garden. We sometimes use the word "order" to describe the classification of dead things, but it is a misnomer. In the crypt of the church of the Capuchins at Rome four thousand skeletons of those who were once members of that brotherhood are arranged with ingenious ghastliness. The skeletons are built into symmetrical stacks which form the dividing walls, and each brother has a breviary or a little bunch of faded flowers in his bony hands. The skeletons or mummies are attired in the brown cloak of the order, held in its place by a girdle. Joints and bones are fixed to form chandeliers and bas-reliefs on the walls, and the altars are built of arms and legs and fingers selected with architectural precision. Placed in the niches of the crypt are distinguished members of the brotherhood. The grouping is faultless, but this ingenious gruesomeness is the mere travesty of order. The tact, patience, and moral magnetism of twelve apostles are not needed for that feat. Such a type of order could be brought about by the callous hand of a mere sexton. It is not order when men and women of servile temper, dead in both soul and brain, subject themselves to ecclesiastical dictatorships. It is not order when religion is made to consist in that which is outward, and a large percentage of the Church membership is numb and slumberous. It is not order when a number of pleasant-mannered, suburban quietists, trained to the tradition of respect for office, meet together once on the Lord's Day, and are no more seen for the rest of the week. It is not order when the priest is every-

thing and the others are cyphers. Order begins only when the four winds blow upon the slain, and after the mystic resurrection has come, they draw together in a closely linked phalanx to fight the battles of the Lord of hosts. Order begins only with the blast of the bugle and the roll-call, and when there is a great falling into line. To produce order in a community of men and women distinctive in their personalities and including the utmost diversity of taste and temperament is a surpassing triumph of Divine skill and power. It is not an achievement of statecraft. The order commended by the apostle consists with liberty, intelligence, and self-government.

Order implies three or four things.

1. Submission to a common authority, seen or unseen as the case may be.

2. The suppression of all tastes, caprices, sensibilities at the point where they conflict with the great ends sought.

3. The discovery of the part each has to play in a common scene of toil and conflict.

4. The performance of each man's part by methods that will help and not hinder the service and ministration of the rest.

Order presupposes *submission to a common centre of authority.* Its worth and quality will be determined by the kind of authority which calls it forth. In a Church reaching the New Testament ideal each man must be brought to feel that his vocation, and the faith by which he works out that vocation, are from God, and that God Himself is behind both his creed and his work. We shall soon find ourselves in revolt if we suspect that a fellow-mortal without a clear mandate from God has defined

the creed to which we must subscribe, and prescribed the work in which we must co-operate. The doctrine of human depravity is fatal to all official authority which boasts that it is plenary in its gifts, final in its pronouncements, indefectible in its anointing. The spiritual headship of Christ is the first condition of religious order. To this the will must submit, the intellect bow, and the whole life subject itself.

The Church at Colosse, more perhaps than any other over which the apostle watched, was exposed to intellectual temptations that were fraught with peculiar peril. Speculations about the graded hierarchies of the spirit-world seem to have been rife, and were made the bases of imaginary obligations towards angels, which tended to obscure the plain, self-evident duties of the Christian life. Subjection to Christ's will, daily schooling in the wisdom of which He was the fulness, docile waiting for His directing word, would guard against novel heresies and allay all riot and disorder of the intellect.

The tendency of the present hour is to glory in any and every eccentricity of religious belief. We put a premium upon novelties—if at least our novelties are guaranteed to go to pieces in a decade—and make way for more garish and insistent novelties. We are proud of holding unconventional opinions, and set ourselves to use the last inch of liberty that has been won for us, whether we need it or not. And yet "one faith," perverted though the watchword may often be, is at the basis of a harmonious and well-ordered fellowship in worship and ministry. We may read too much or too little into that watchword. Outside the simple truths that are necessary to salvation, we are not compelled to think along prescribed

lines ; but there is a realm, known to the conscience of every man if he will honestly seek its guidance, where we must simply submit to Christ's judgment, and without wilfulness or vagary. He is the leader of our faith, and to His guiding word we must give reverent heed. True order arises out of the common subjection of the thought and the common dedication of the strength to Jesus Christ.

Order implies *the suppression of lawless and capricious personal tastes*, and the art of possessing our souls in patience at all times. No well-blended collective action is possible where each does what is right in his own sight. To produce the condition of Church life commended in the text, some personal excess perchance must be chastened and brought under control. God, it is true, is not the enemy of individuality, and our providential work will always afford scope for every legitimate form of it ; but we have to watch against those spurious and extravagant expressions of temperament which offend the sensibilities of our fellow-believers, and antagonise with the best welfare of Christ's commonwealth. Order is at an end when men are seized with an epidemic of self-assertion. No more prolific cause of strifes, envyings, schisms, disorganisation, can arise than morbid and hypersensitive egoism.

Modern life we are sometimes told is fatal to healthy individuality, for it grinds men by its tyrannous frictions into painful sameness. The pendulum swings in the opposite direction, and we find ourselves idolising an angularity which is often painful and disturbing. We hear the preference expressed again and again for a man with "his corners on." But the work God makes ready for us

will offer ample scope for our most strongly marked qualities, and there is no need for us to cultivate angles of character as the fashionable costumier cultivates bulges in the physical outline which after all are deformities. Sometimes we suppress the heretic and gratify our craving for outlandishness by patronising the pulpit buffoon. The temper which affects extravagance or is indulgent to the diseased self-assertion which passes for personal idiosyncrasy, is the enemy of order and of all the gains that follow from its maintenance. Eccentricity is like the cracked scream or deafening shout which upsets the balance of parts and implies innate vulgarity and coarse assertiveness of soul. We must make our choice between the luxury of letting out our personal freakishness and the contentment that comes as we watch the benefits attending this law of order when it obtains in the realm of the spiritual. Self-vaunting should pass away in presence of the silent, persuasive sovereignty of redeeming love as, dew-like, it diffuses itself amongst Christ's followers. The frantic effort of one man to dominate another will never neutralise and destroy those forces fatal to order which lie in ambush within us.

And to illustrate this quality praised by the apostle we need not only conquer pride but pain also. Great issues may be put into jeopardy by our petulance and wrath, and we must train ourselves to calmness and to fortitude. During the late war in Cuba a number of the American soldiers gave a magnificent example of order in circumstances of extreme distress. A war correspondent tells us how, when a fierce engagement was taking place and bullets were whistling through the air, he noticed a line

of men flat on their stomachs in a trench just beneath the brow of a hill, across which lay the foe. Going a few steps further he met the commander of the regiment and said to him, "These are your reserves, I suppose." "No," said he, "they are my casualties." And these brave fellows were quietly waiting side by side, as if in military formation, till the fight was over and they could be carried to the hospital tent. Not a groan was heard nor a whisper of complaint against the leaders. Now and again one who was not quite so grievously wounded as the rest would raise himself on his elbow and give a drink of water or render any help possible to a suffering comrade. History records no finer illustration of order than that. It was inspired by devotion to a great cause. And when we are the victims of mischance, when our hearts ache with the sense of wrong, when every fibre is racked with pain and the spirit faints within us, we must not forget to rule ourselves and maintain that spirit of discipline which is needful to victory.

Order implies an *intuition of the part each has to play in a common scheme of life and work.* It is sometimes a much easier thing for us to discover our own vocation, especially when it suits our natural vein and gives us an agreeable return of influence and publicity, than it is for us to discover the vocations of those at our side and to accord them liberty and encouragement in working out their providential tasks. Not infrequently, in a temper of unholy aggressiveness, we allow our programme to trench upon the domain of a neighbour's work, and narrow the conditions under which he must act if he is to act successfully. It is as much a sin to set aside the least gifted and conspicuous follower of Jesus Christ, to belittle his

contribution to the kingdom of God, to speak slightingly of the place he should fill in the common ministries of the Church, as to blackball one of the early fathers or rail at the official rights of a row of bishops. In the true Church all are in office, and the principle of order attains its finest exemplification where there is the largest amount of collective activity. In a vocabulary only too familiar in our midst, "order" is supposed to be a monopoly of those special organisations which conform most nearly to autocratic types of worldly government, and means dumb subservience to select clericalisms. In the Latin language "rank" and "order" are described by the same word, and this ambiguity has led to false views of Church authority ; but there was no such association of ideas in the language spoken by Christ and His apostles. The power of the episcopate is looked upon by many as the corner-stone of all Church order, so that a man who has felt the touch of prelatical hands is in "holy orders." As a matter of fact, in many communities the power of the priest often absorbs into itself all other rights and powers. Now we cannot allow that the New Testament ideal of order is realised where there is a prolific growth of titles, offices, ecclesiastical distinctions, and Christ's teaching about the equality of discipleship is forgotten. It is not easy to see how the ideal of order is fulfilled where crowds of people come together once or twice a week, and murmur meek responses to prescribed prayers, and the priest is the Church. Genuine Church office is not caste prerogative secured by letters patent, but it represents varied spontaneous spiritual function, and there are exactly as many orders of ministry as there are living gifts to be classi-

fied, no more and no less. Work is the reason for office, and office is not the necessary title authority and qualification for work ; and true zeal for work will be a sufficient force to neutralise the bias to schism, captiousness, and disorder.

The order here commended asserts itself in connection with *those practical ministries which devolve upon a Christian Church in its common, corporate life.* It implies that each person has a part to play in a Divine plan, and that the part is being so played that others are helped and not hindered in their appointed tasks. We are correlated pieces in a great supernatural organism, and must both fit ourselves into our providential spheres and make plain the way for others to do the same. In sending out machinery to be put together in remote countries of the world where skilled labour is unknown, the manufacturer numbers each separate bit and marks its place in the whole, so that even an inexperienced hand can build it up into working order. By God's secret sign every man is marked for his place in the glorious economies of human salvation. The men and women of our Churches sometimes look like a hopeless puzzle, and one wonders how we shall ever combine them into happy adjustment and usefulness ; but if they have any right to be in the Church at all, there is about them somewhere or other the token of a providential designation. God never calls human beings into the kingdom of His Son without giving them some task to fulfil ; and there will be no true order till we have made out what that task is and begin to act upon the discovery. We do not realise the ideal of order when we suffer all the work of the Church to be put upon a limited number of men, however capable.

An English writer about life in Russia tells us that the peasants of almost every village are enrolled into amateur fire brigades, and each man has his appointed task, which is notified by a device painted over his house door. At one door is inscribed a bucket, over another a ladder, over a third a fire escape, over a fourth a coil of rope. Each article needed in putting out the flames or in the rescue of imperilled life is there, as well as the man to use it. There are no muddled functions, no confusing interchanges of responsibility, and every inhabitant must be ready at call. A Church in which God's law of order prevails should be organised upon some such model. At times we set one or two capable men to do everything. But each disciple of Christ has a ministry to fulfil, a vocation to teach, to comfort, to testify and to save. We are all pieces of a supernatural organism created by the genius of Jesus Christ, moved by the impulse of His spirit, subject to His guiding hand, and should ever be running without pause, friction, check, or breakdown.

Order implies not only the discovery of the part each has to play in a common scheme but *the fulfilment of that special part by methods which will help and not hinder the work of others.* There is no order where one man, through clumsiness or obtrusive self-sufficiency, gets into another man's way, rendering his Divinely appointed part difficult or impossible. Derangement occurs in machinery when a shaft is sprained, or a bearing cracked, or a wheel loosened so that it leaves its appointed course, causing the whole to drive heavily and at last break down. The Church is a finely adjusted and complex instrument, and one part must sustain and convey momentum to another.

Cross-purposes should never appear in this confederation of forces. The apostle should never discountenance the prophet, nor the evangelist the teacher. Sometimes the spheres of enterprise conflict with each other. The Church does not help the Sunday School nor the Sunday School the Church. A benighted official puts himself in the way of the Temperance movement, or a representative of the old order sets himself to anathematise the new. The tendency is for every man to attach, I will not say undue importance to his own work, but to underestimate the value of a branch with which he is not so closely identified. By self-absorption, by insularity, by an overweening estimate of ourselves, by the assumption that if our fellow-disciples will only put their proxies into our hands we can soon bring in the millennium, by the restriction and partiality of our sympathies, by glorifying the man whom we choose for our special hero, forgetting that God gives more abundant honour to the part which lacks, by trying to sacrifice one department of work to another of less obtrusive usefulness, we conflict with the principle of order and narrow its benign sway. The dominion of that principle we help and extend by sympathy, by unwearied patience in our own particular tasks, by a sagacious and hearty recognition of the parts others are seeking to play, by such zeal and unselfish enthusiasm in our own spheres that we shall uplift the spirit that prevails in all spheres of work. We must be pacemakers to our neighbours, and never put stumbling-blocks in the path of those who are zealots and enthusiasts, if they are sincere in their discipleship. Under the saddest discouragements we must inspirit our comrades with

fortitude and hope, and so uphold and advance that Divine virtue of order which is at the root of concerted life and effectual action.

Where this Divine temper prevails fitness will ensure for every service demanded from the Church by its Redeeming Head. In common things we find that when confusion is allowed to creep in, and the thing needed is no longer in its right place, the little tasks of life cannot be punctually and prosperously done. In libraries where no book is in its own section or under its proper number, and the reference desired at the moment cannot be found, work must be indefinitely postponed. Some desks are more like waste-paper heaps than anything else, so that important letters or valuable business documents are never forthcoming at the crucial moment. Shops and stores are now and again visited in which the article wanted is on the premises of course, but unless the customer will wait patiently till chance brings it to the surface, the opportunity for making a sale is lost and business goes elsewhere. Now in the Church where order reigns, Christ never seeks a service that is not forthcoming. A disciple will step forth equipped for every demand. The voice which asks, Who will go for us? can never ask in vain or ask and be met with an awkward pause. The Lord's directing hand never points out a task without a suitable man, presenting himself to grapple with it, backed by the prayer and moral authority of the whole Church. No misleading test of the validity of a Church is this principle of order established within it, and the test again of the extent to which this principle of order rules, is not the exact number of ranks into which the clergy are divided nor glimpses of a thin

and wavering thread of historical continuity, but the degree of prompt and wide ranging responsiveness to Jesus Christ as he puts upon the consciences of His people the needs of a redeemed world.

Success is measured by the spirit of order which animates men and the communities into which they are grouped. It is order which distinguishes the brain of the scholar from that of the imbecile. It is order which distinguishes the country in which every square foot of land is highly cultivated, from the districts overrun by the Bedou'n, where the peasant does not venture to sow his seed. It is order which distinguishes the Roman legion, before which nothing could stand, from the helpless rabble which takes to its heels at the sight of a tin sword. In a common crowd no one has any special task assigned, and there is a lack of that confidence which trusty and honoured leadership always inspires. Order is the scientific expression of collective faith, zeal, enterprise.

In an age which is unfriendly to human prerogative it may perhaps be our temptation to depreciate order and cry out for guerilla evangelism. Order, it must be admitted is too often a synonym for frigidity, red tape, servile mechanism, punctiliousness in trifles, death. Order is sometimes the base argument in the lips of the despot as he calls upon those about him to bow the knee. Order has now and again suspicious affinities with formalism, tradition, arctic hybernation. But in the apostle's vocabulary it means the tramp of Christ's conquering hosts in perfect time to God's music. It means the coherent and well-tempered activities of a Church possessed by passionate love and loyalty to its king. It means the rhythm of the

spirit-world, faultless interaction, strategy in which a thousand God-guided movements blend ; the common responsiveness of those who are members of Christ's body to the volition of that Head to which they are savingly united.

Order helps *that stedfastness of faith* which is the second great quality commended by the apostle. The lack of it brings panic, disorganisation, abasement, defeat. Mutual trust, united action, strong endurance are not possible in a crowd gathered by chance, because the individuals composing it have no mutual appreciation of each other's aims and no covenant to act together. The lack of concert, the cross-purposes sure to arise, the suspicion inevitable amongst strangers breed fear and make the mob, however large, captives at will of the drilled and disciplined few.

The wreck of the *Birkenhead*, half a century ago, affords a striking illustration of the union of order and stedfastness. As the ill-fated troopship went down four hundred men stood in line on the deck as though paraded for an inspection. Not a cry was heard as the reeling vessel plunged into the black, swirling depths with her freight of living souls. The order that had been long learned contributed not a little to the stedfastness displayed by those valorous souls in face of such a distressful doom. If left to themselves many of the men would have been incapable of such a feat. But they had been schooled to concerted obedience, and the courage of the strong infused itself into the weak, making that historic act possible. And the same thing is true in its religious application. Harmonious fellowship, co-ordinated action, loyal adhesion to common plans, a sanctified *esprit de corps* will lift

the weak, the wavering, and the distrustful out of their baser selves, and make them valiant and unflinching. Order promotes stedfastness. Its prevalence in Church life is the basis of mutual edification, and is an object-lesson of that trust in unseen things which helps to produce sure conviction in others.

Quiet and undisturbed conditions of life are sometimes attended by *a specious show of stedfastness lacking all inherent reality.* Unless the foundations be deeply laid, faith may prove itself a fair-weather virtue that can only survive under circumstances of indulgent tenderness. Sooner or later the crisis of trial comes, and proves how superficial was the profession.

In making a mountain ascent you may have observed great boulders of rock that have suddenly stopped short on the edge of a precipice, and it seems as though the slightest touch would topple them over. Or these boulders have been brought to a stand on a steep gradient where you would scarcely be able to stop yourself if you were sliding down the declivity. It looks as though a strong wind might start these masses of rock again on their plunge to the valley. Now the geologist will tell you that for ten or twenty thousand years this particular district has been exempt from earthquake. If there had been any marked movement in the crust of the earth, these delicately poised rocks and boulders would have been tumbled headlong down to the valley. The balancing of tons of rock in steep places is proof of an equilibrium that has lasted for ages.

And are there not men and women who are attached in the slenderest possible way to the work, person, and

kingdom of Jesus Christ? They occupy singularly ticklish positions, and if the least breath of controversy, the faintest strain of trial, the most trifling murmur of reproach or offence were to arise, away they would go to the world. They stake everything perhaps upon the date of an inspired book, the method of its composition, a special theory of the atonement, the interpretation of prophecy. Controversy would be fatal to their faith, and they eschew it. The pulpit teaching to which they have listened for a generation has never even hinted at the existence of burning questions, and the Church in which they are enrolled has been administered with a courtier-like prudence and suavity, or they would have been outside. The region in which the lot of these people has been cast is not one of earthquake activity. Now that is equilibrium and not stedfastness; but equilibrium is a thing of outward circumstance and not a quality of character. It is not encouraging to see people poised between heaven and the valley in that particular way. Our stedfastness, like that of the Colossians, must be shown in times of controversy and gainsaying. Believers in Jesus ought to be broad-based as mountain ranges which cannot be moved. In times of debate and contradiction the elect follower will prove himself a man of rock. When humiliation comes the Master will say to him as to the twelve, "Ye are they that have continued with Me in My temptations." When the ebb of reaction sets in, and many turn back, the believer dear to the Lord will only become stronger in his passionate allegiance and devotion. No schism can tear him from Christ or warp him from his appointed place and work in the Church.

Does not our faith sometimes sit lightly on us, and does the work of recent always compare favourably with that of our early years? Is there no room to fear lest our faith should turn out to be skin-deep only, a veneer of youthful sentiment which does not take hold upon the deepest things in our nature and life? How many of us are like the disciples who once wrought mighty works but lost their faith and fell into confusion when in the absence of the Master the cold, sceptical scribes stood around them questioning. A violent earthquake occurred in Jamaica a century ago. From time immemorial rich foliage had clothed the side of a steep mountain which descended to the sea-shore. But in the throes of the earthquake fields, forests, and orchards slipped down to the beach, and the slope, once tree-tufted to the summit, became a barren escarpment of rock upon which nothing could be made to grow. The soil had been superficial, averaging only a few inches in depth, and it was almost entirely carried away by the vibration of the earth and the downsliding of the forest. And the declining fruitfulness in our lives may be explained by a like shallowness and instability. There was once luxuriant promise, early usefulness, glorious ingathering, but years of ploughing upon the rock followed these things. Has not the first faith so fertile in blessing to ourselves and others been disturbed if not carried away by the shocks, revolutions, controversies of recent years? The faith was quite sincere, but its depth could be described in inches. To some extent at least it was a sentiment, an enthusiasm of the blood tinctured with piety, a product of what lay upon the surface of the nature rather than a deliberate, intelligent, deep, penetrating principle. The

cost of Christ's service had not been counted with discretion, nor had the surrender to that service been hearty and complete, or the preparation would have been better for the testing times at hand. We want a faith which not only touches a man's outlying sensibility and kindles his imagination, but dominates his reason, his conscience, and his will, and enters into all the elements of which his nature is built.

We live in times of change, upheaval, disquiet, of higher criticism and counterblasts. The accepted authorship of the sacred books, the current theories of inspiration, the trustworthiness of the synoptic traditions, the evolution of man and all that it involves, the constituent articles of the Christian creed are asserted, denied, qualified, till we feel like the Chinese prisoner who is tortured to death by being kept always awake. What are we to believe? How must we maintain our ground? When are the Churches to have rest from this new persecution of the intellect and to be edified? What should be our attitude towards these new movements of thought? Well, had the primitive Church never to readjust any of its positions? Has not Christianity in its missionary stages often had to reconcile itself to new philosophies with which it has been brought face to face? Had the Church of the Reformation era to look at theology from no new point of view? The changes were as revolutionary for them as any pending changes that may be before us, and the transition was effected without final loss or deterioration of faith.

The foundations of our faith must be well and deeply laid if we are to attain this ideal of stedfastness. For us at least religion must be the best demonstrated of all truths, the most central of all realities, the most

imperial of all obligations. In earthquakes it has been found that there is less oscillation at the bottom of mines than near the surface of the ground, and it is obvious from this fact that buildings with the deepest foundations have the best chance of standing. And the more profoundly we enter into the heart of God's truth the less sensitive shall we be to the agitations of the passing hour. The tremors, convulsions, and sickening disquietudes of which we make so much are often superficial, and the more inward and deep-based our religion is, the less we shall be fluttered and jeopardised by such things. The spirit of the times, the trend of the present-day temper with all its disturbing forces, the things that are outside ourselves, rarely, if ever, destroy the vital trusts of the man who is in conscious fellowship with his Lord. Let us look well to those direct personal elements in faith, which, after all, are the sinews of its patient continuance. Our greatest fear should be lest the movements which sometimes disturb and dismay our souls, may perchance find us unspiritual, predisposed to magnify the things of the senses and their values, restless and irritable under the demand made upon us to struggle with ourselves, and to believe in God at all times. Faith always has been and always must be a strife, whilst we continue in the flesh. It is not a home of rest or a pensioners' hospital into which we may pass and find ourselves at peace for the rest of our days, notwithstanding the turmoil and the clashing conditions of thought which prevail outside. It behoves us to beware, on the one hand, of pliability and recklessness, and on the other of a brittle suicidal rigidity.

The stedfastness of faith is *not inconsistent with freedom, mental flexibility, an all-round power of self-*

adjustment when the great emergency comes. The ingenious Japanese have devised a plan for keeping their lofty pagodas unhurt in a zone of chronic earthquakes. Inside the pagoda and not far from the top story a ledge is built out; upon this ledge a framework of heavy timber is made to rest, and to this framework a mass of perpendicular timber is clamped which hangs almost as freely as the clapper of a bell. When the ground begins to rock and heave and billow, this free-moving mass of timber shifts the centre of gravity from moment to moment as the pagoda oscillates, and helps to keep the towering mass of brickwork in its place. Now, if we are to be firm in the faith and to guard ourselves against overthrow, our attitude towards the truths of salvation must be just as free and flexible. Under all changes we must ever lean towards the one centre, Jesus Christ. It may not be wise or right in us to swear by the higher criticism or against it; in the present stage of research, to say we will stand or fall by the particular form in which some Christian dogma has been stated, to stake everything upon a theory of the atonement which is said to be out of date, or upon the other theory which is only half formulated and does not take account of all the principles involved; but under all disquiet and unsettlement we must ever gravitate towards that central redemptive love which is our only hope. If we rest the weight of our sin, care, destiny, upon Christ, we shall keep ourselves upon a foundation that never shifts.

Stability in faith, conduct, service, enterprise, is the great need of the Christian Churches. We must learn to stand firmly, to stand at times when we seem to be strained and tested through every faculty of the

intellect and every sensibility of the heart. Whilst we must do our utmost to encourage and uphold each other, we must be prepared, if needs be, to stand in our solitary strength. Some of Christ's followers seem to require daily supervision to the very end of their careers. We expect this in the young who need tender and constant nurture in times of novel temptation, and in those who have been rescued from frightful and despotic vices, and in some strangely timid and sensitive creatures who are ever ready to be grieved and to turn aside. But the majority of the Church membership ought to grow beyond those stages of peril which impose so much care and vigilance upon others. Every minister could write out a long list of people who, like the boy's whipping-top, must be kept up and made to spin by the constant application of the lash. There must be the everlasting flick, lash, fillip, whip, or they begin to wobble and down they go. Let us rise above that petty condition. If we have hitherto been earnest and active only in times of revival, we must learn to maintain the zeal and activity which are at the foundation of all character, without undue dependence upon special excitement and popular enthusiasm.

Is your faith the deepest and most influential thing in your life? Do you realise that it determines the character, and that when this is firm all is firm? If your faith be living, constant, tenacious, not only do the under shepherds rejoice but the great Lord of the Churches sees of his soul-travail and rejoices, "beholding your order and the stedfastness of your faith in Christ."

"Stand fast; quit you like men; be strong."

VII

SELF-POSSESSION

"And he said unto me, Son of man, stand upon thy feet, and I will speak to thee."—EZEK. ii. 1.

NAPOLEON THE THIRD is said to have shown traces of a strange power which may perhaps be described as the exact converse of that personal magnetism by which some leaders enthuse and exalt their allies. His presence seemed to lower for the time being the vitality and intelligence of those who came into contact with him, and so acted as to destroy their self-possession. By some occult spell cast over them he could disturb their recollectedness and so exhaust their power that it was impossible for them to be at their best in his company. If that curious man was conscious of any such gift and set himself to exercise it, the motive could only have been selfish, inhuman, flagrantly wicked. Some men laying no claim to occult endowments do, nevertheless, delight to over-awe and paralyse all possible rivals, and we apply to them one of the most contemptuous epithets in the language. Animated by envy, the lust of dominion, prancing egotism, they take a sinister pleasure in obtruding their power and asserting their opppressive audacity. There is a despotism of the will, the brain,

and the tongue, just as unholy as the despotism of the irresponsible autocrat who tramples upon the bodies and material interests of those subject to his sway. Such tempers and methods are inconsistent with true benevolence of character. The man who is great by gift, office, or opportunity, and at the same time of unfeigned goodness, will shrink back from the idea of incapacitating by oblique terrorism those who come within the field of his influence. He will wish them to employ their powers for the common weal to the best possible advantage, and will therefore seek to put them at their ease, to encourage them to intellectual self-command, to build them up and not to cast them down.

God's dealings with His servants of all ages correspond to our conception of His gentle and gracious character. The vision of His presence and power is not meant to permanently depress, overawe, and incapacitate. His glory is overwhelming, but it is not His will to annihilate reason and all that constitutes personality by the manifestations of His majesty. As in the cases of Job, Ezekiel, John in Patmos, he calls His servants to dignified self-possession, to collectedness of mind, to quiet, unfluttered reason and deliberation in His presence. "Gird up thy loins now like a man ; for I will demand of thee and answer thou me." "Stand upon thy feet and I will speak unto thee." "And He laid His right hand upon me, saying unto me, Fear not."

Self-possession is necessary *for the highest forms of intercourse with God*, as well as *for that service of God amongst men for which such intercourse qualifies.* The Divine Service is essentially reasonable, establishing its sanctions through an appeal to the reason and

achieving its ends by the instrumentality of the reason.

I. Self-possession is necessary for *the highest forms of intercourse with God.* A man cannot be a recipient of the Divine revelations till he has made some little progress in the art of collecting and commanding his own faculties. Now and again God makes Himself known in vivid and stupendous ways which smite mortals with fear and trembling. For the time being He strips them of their manliness. As He suddenly discovers Himself to their inner sense, they seem to be plunged into an atmosphere in which it is all but impossible to breathe. Some such feeling afflicts them as though they had been placed under the receiver of an air-pump and all that vitalises the mental consciousness were being slowly sucked away. The characteristic attributes of the human personality are numbed, stifled, half destroyed, and the man who is the subject of these manifestations might well think himself in the throes of a process intended to dissolve the elements which make up the unity of his being, and merge him irrecoverably into the terrible Infinite. Now this paralysing sense of the supernatural which appears to threaten the obliteration of the individual is only temporary. God does not wish to subtract anything from the personality, or to make us less than that which He created us to be. It can be no part of His design to sink us below the stature of our full manhood, and to make us grovel in His presence, just as the subjects of some Eastern kings are expected, when appearing before the throne, to drop, like quadrupeds, upon all fours. This putting forth of His subduing splendour both upon contumacious sinners and saints whose obedience is discounted by reserva-

tions, has its urgent needs-be. It arrests men in their headstrong sin, it tames the soul to completer harmony with God's requirements, it touches sleeping fibres of faith and reverence which have escaped quickening in the superficial processes of bygone years. But, after all, the only thing God wants to drive out of the personality is the taint of selfishness, affinity for wrong, soft *complaisance* towards transgression. Indeed it is the sin latent in us which produces collapse before His presence, and when that is gone serene self-possession is recovered. He does not wish to blight, or repress and destroy a single element in the constituent sum of a man's identity. His first word after laying low the turbulent transgressor, or overwhelming with His glory the imperfect and half-hearted servant, is the word that calls us to our feet and bids us be ourselves.

This lack of quiet self-possession is sometimes the reason why stricken, conquered, *storm-tossed souls cannot enter into the quiet of saving faith.* A temptation to keep back the obedient response to God's solicitation of human confidence may come in two opposite ways. Many a man persuades himself that his heart is not so profoundly stirred that he can exercise the faith that will save him. He is too cool, too much master of himself, too deliberate and calculating and self-possessed in his moods. The psychological atmosphere, he is tempted to think, is far too normal and commonplace. And, on the other hand, those most profoundly wrought upon, most overpowered by a sense of their guilt, and the vision of the Divine holiness, exercised to the point of distraction by some force, which has seized upon their emotions, find it difficult to collect their minds into an intelligent and

purposeful act of faith. Their natures are almost stupefied by the mighty supernatural arrest that has come to them. They feel as most people feel after some sudden and tragic trouble has burst over their heads, as though they were made of stone. The power of thought and emotion is for the moment frozen up or has almost passed away. They cannot collect themselves for the transaction which is required at their hands. They are prostrate, inert through excess of feeling—"all of a heap" as the familiar and homely phrase puts it. Saul, the blinded persecutor, must have been in some such condition, as he lay prone at the gate of Damascus, for he could not there and then put forth the faith by which he was healed, built up, sanctified. Time and opportunity must be allowed for the mind to assert itself, a space for rest and mental recuperation, meet occasion for the panic-stricken powers to concentrate themselves again, and to act. God cannot breathe faith into a purely passive soul, or a soul exhausted by the excess of its own emotion. The nature prostrate and helpless through a cataclysm of overwhelming conviction must be brought out of its paralysing amazement. Faith is an act which demands collectedness of mind, a rational and reflective attitude, modest self-possession. Overwhelming emotion may sometimes precede and may often follow conversion, but the critical moment of faith is a moment of calm and intelligent endeavour. True it is that faith is God's gift, but the hand that receives is not the hand clutched with terror or folded in sleep, but the hand which is heedfully and unfalteringly held out. God can no more put faith into a nature benumbed by the excess of its own emotion than He can put faith into a nature dead in sin and

abiding in death. There must be quiet, collected, steadily focussed vigilance.

Whilst reverence in God's presence is a duty from which there can be no release, *that sacred emotion of the soul is not meant to dumbfound and transfix us*, however mighty the revelations to which it is a tribute. Indeed, the reverence that is allied to helplessness and maimed perception is manifestly a sentiment of inferior quality. The man who wishes to dazzle the supporters he is rallying to his side brings some kind of reproach upon himself. He who seeks to lull his admirers into dreaminess or to fascinate them into stupor and so disarm their judgments, confesses thereby the meagreness of his own power to captivate by reason and by love. The commander-in-chief of an army who plots to drug the battalions of his opponents, admits thereby the weakness of his own fighting forces. He is not able under normal conditions to measure himself against his adversaries. If as God comes forth to conquer us, His revelations put the larger part of our mental life to sleep or obscure a single faculty or perception, that would be practically a confession of weakness on His part. It would imply He had not adequate moral and spiritual reserve forces wherewith to subdue our souls into adoration of His attributes and homage to His great behests. The first flash of His presence may affright, stupefy, half blind; but it is because we have been such atheists in the past, and have accustomed ourselves so to live that the sense of His presence is strange to us. By and by all the powers of our nature will rise up to receive Him in the vast totality of His greatness and splendour. When God sees fit to disclose His

majesty and abase our pride, He does not intend to permanently weaken, discourage, paralyse. That would be to surround Himself with worshippers of meaner capacity and servants of inferior fitness for His tasks. He has nothing in common with those barbarian kings who are pleased to have dwarfs, deaf mutes, and shrivelled monstrosities for their pages, and who make their courts spectacles of deformity and mutilation. Alike for the honour of His own name, the quality of love He wishes to win to His person, and the prosperity of the work to which He designates those who are visited by His revelations, He desires to call forth, train, and perfect the undivided powers of those whom He seals and sends.

The largest and *the loftiest service of God is that which is rational* in the best sense of the word. Those disclosures of His being, character, and operation which God will make both in this life and in that which is to come, are intended to stimulate and not to depress that group of faculties of which the brain is the symbol. Is it likely that God by His breath would create this subtle mechanism of thought within us for the gross, sordid ends of our physical life, and then when we pass to the confines of a nobler destiny would wreck the mechanism by the impact of His unmeasured revelations or throw it out of working gear by the fierce, untempered pressure of His terrible presence? He has created us all that which we find ourselves, so that we may be better able to comprehend Him than beings less richly endowed, and we cannot think that this special capacity will be overborne and destroyed as soon as the goal comes into view. At the zenith of his development man can pay his Maker a loftier

tribute than bird, beast, or flower; it is therefore incredible that the Maker should wish to take us permanently back a single step towards lower levels of intelligence, by suspending the functions of any of our faculties, as a sign even of His superior grandeur. Every mental power must be healthy, well mastered, on the alert, so that we lose nothing from His many-sided revelations. God is more honoured by the praise of a wakeful, active-minded congregation than by the praise of a solitary worshipper or two whilst the rest are asleep. The soul is an assembly of faculties whose operations blend into each other, and God is most worthily extolled and glorified when the crowd of faculties within us is alive, conscious, operative, rather than dazed by a mood compounded of wonder and fear in which consciousness is all but lost. We cannot apprehend God and assimilate His truth and life in states of feeling which are not far removed from trance conditions. The highest intercourse with God attainable by a human soul is that in which the soul is perfectly at ease, competent to command its own powers and apply its own discernments. The calm, self-possessed, open-eyed, and open-eared reverence of Jesus Christ as He stood in the transfiguration cloud was nearer to God's ideal for humanity than the half-swooning dulness and somnolent subconsciousness of the amazed and prostrate disciples.

Men may pass into *mental states in which we describe them as possessed*—possessed either by the Spirit of God for good, or by an unclean spirit for evil. But possession represents only a half-way stage towards a final goal of holiness or sin. There is something worse than devil possession before the

wicked man; it is the state in which he has become master of himself for evil, and without the prompting or instigation of an associated mind brings his entire nature into play to promote what is bad. And perhaps there is something higher even than being possessed by a Divine afflatus for good; it is the state in which a man has become master over himself for what is noble, and quietly and thoughtfully uses the entire group of his disciplined powers for the apprehension of God and the furtherance of His will amongst others. Perhaps that may never be reached in this life, or reached only as the consummation of its gracious training. In possession, both for evil and good, the personality becomes more or less veiled, overborne, suppressed.

Manifestations of the Divine glory that confound and disable through their momentary intenseness, unfit for the truest and most comprehensive communion with God. Vivid theophanies may have overwhelmed saints of peculiar privilege at some turning-point in their vocation, and plunged them into self-forgetting transports, but it has ever been in the Divine order that the highest powers of the mind should come to assert themselves afresh; and the unutterable and awe-struck experiences of the great Jehovah's presence at last issued in making those who received them more royally masters of themselves and their own spiritual resources and endowments.

In our own as well as in earlier times Christianity has fallen under the spell of *Oriental philosophies which assume that the basis of human personality is evil*, and its duration therefore fleeting; and that reabsorption into the infinite and universal life is the

goal of all aspiration and progress. Preachers who are more eclectic than profound sometimes deny a physical resurrection, speak ambiguously about the permanence of the individual consciousness, and half imply that in the end we shall be taken back into the Divine and be as indistinguishably lost there as we were before our creation. The manifestations which rapt Old Testament prophets and New Testament apostles out of themselves are fraught with hints of what will overtake all finite minds in the supreme hour of God's unveiling. If immortality is affirmed at all, it is affirmed as an attribute of the race rather than of its members, of the power which moulds universal life rather than as a property of those who embody the mystery of life for a season and then vanish away. Such theories suggest a universe presided over by the spider which sucks the vital juices out of its victims and leaves fragments of legs and glittering wing-cases to decorate its web. The unexpressed idea seems to be that the infinite cannot tolerate the finite, that it is always thirsting to draw every attribute of manhood out of us, and that it will leave at last the mere husk and shell of an effete personality behind, bleaching into final invisibility, or perhaps not even so much as that. The infinite is painted as though it were the giant of the solar myth who devoured his own children, a dark, bottomless whirlpool of fury drawing down all created life into the vortex. Such a view credits God with predatory instincts rather than pays Him the glory due to His absolute and eternal love. No father wishes to see the essential personalities of his children effaced, and to think of them as reaching the height of their destiny in an apotheosis of

absorption would pierce the heart of parental love with grief and dismay. God wishes to take out of our personalities nothing but what is hateful—selfishness, folly, moral blemish and defect.

In Christ's high-priestly prayer we find *the charter which pledges the permanence of all those elements which constitute personality.* His own relation to the Father, which presupposed the essentials of personality, was to be the standard looked to in the perfecting of the disciples. "As Thou, Father, art in Me and I in Thee, that they also may be one in us." Our Lord's union with the Father was not of such a type as to lead Him to think of Himself as the Father rather than the Son. Whatever else was common between the Son and His Father, consciousness was differentiated and personal, and always had been. And apart from this bifurcation of consciousness, love itself would have been impossible or would have assumed the form of self-love, which, after all, is the negation of love, and positive selfishness of a more or less refined quality. The selfishness of the infinite, if it is conceivable, is far more hideous than the selfishness of the finite. The branch which is grafted into the stock of a tree still produces its own specific flowers in spite of its union with the tree, and produces them more nobly because of the reinforcement of life it receives from the tree. Our Lord's union with the Father accentuated rather than obscured the properties of His personality. The outburst of glory on the holy mount which dazed the disciples and made them heavy with sleep, awoke Christ's faculties into keener consciousness and finer energy. He was in His eternal environment, and all the elements of His life were vastly quickened.

The Father was ever dwelling in the Son, but the personality of the Father was not lost in the mystery of intercommunion; and the Son was ever dwelling in the Father, but He remained a perfectly conscious and clearly defined Son, and His personality was neither volatilised nor swallowed up by the mystic relation. The union which entirely abstracts and absorbs makes communion a fixed impossiblity. And His own age-long fellowship with the Father, Jesus Christ presents as the type and consummation of all human excellence and blessedness. We might as well speak of God losing Himself in man as of man losing his personal consciousness in God and never finding it again. Pantheism makes human personality a mere snow crystal which is to be dissolved in the sun; but in Christ's view it is like the diamond placed in the pathway of the sunbeam. No chemical change is set up which destroys the diamond; on the contrary, new properties are shown in both stone and sun by the juxtaposition of the two, and there is no trace of absorption on either side. The stone does not entomb the sunbeam, nor does the sunbeam disintegrate and dissolve the stone.

Ages await us in which the revelations of God will transcend the grandest disclosures of the past; but even then these revelations will be attempered to our capacity to receive and assimilate. Man's intellectual grasp, far from being overtaxed and palsied by the strange secrets of the future, will only be stimulated and enlarged. The manifestations of glory which await us are sometimes so described as though they were designed to smite men into petrifactions of awe, to put upon the nature a weight of solemnity that will render it entirely passive, to

dispossess the intellect of that which makes it kingly and invests it for royal priesthood, and weaken, if not destroy, all the elements of personal consciousness and self-possession. Now He who spake to Moses as man with friend, who assuaged the fears of John when he was surprised by a countenance which eclipsed the sun shining in his strength, and who told the prophet Ezekiel to lift himself up to the full height of his manhood so that he might learn his great lesson and receive his commission direct from the lips of the Most High Himself, will say to us, as we lie oppressed by the solemn and weighty revelations which will burst upon us at our emancipation from the senses and sense-spheres, "Stand upon thy feet and I will speak unto thee."

We are not children of the mist, freaks of cloud-scape, broken shadows, iridescent vapours, whose destiny it is to confront the sunlight and be irretrievably dissolved. In the maturity of an all-round, unshrinking, indefectible personality, we shall be summoned into the presence of His glory to receive without error or distraction, the nobler teaching of the hereafter. He will call us to lift ourselves up to the full measure of our perfected stature that we may be fit to receive truths which for the present are unutterable. He will need a personality symmetrical, uncrippled, royally upright and complete, to address in the new relationship into which He will call us. He will ask us then to be self-possessed, and He is teaching us the alphabet of that duty now. "Son of man, stand upon thy feet, and I will speak unto thee."

II. A serene and undisturbed temper is necessary not only for the man who is an elect recipient of

Divine revelations but for *the man also who is to be a messenger of these revelations to others.* Courage before men is a characteristic of the genuine prophet; a timid, blushing, disconcerted herald from God's throne is an incongruous compound. The first apostles did much to prove their place in the holy succession by the firmness with which they spake under circumstances which would have abashed men with a less convincing religious history behind them. St. Paul recognised the obligation resting upon him to preach the gospel "with boldness."

In the chapters to which the vision of Ezekiel is a prelude, the prophetic office is illustrated by the duty laid upon the sentinel or watchman. For such work the power of calm, unerring discernment is indispensable. One set apart to this momentous task must be self-collected, able to see clearly, having all his wits under control, as well as stout in heart to peal out promptly the unhesitating note of warning. The recruit who has the slightest tendency to hallucination, who is inclined to be unduly sanguine or unduly depressed, who may be swept off his feet by panic, struck dumb by strange spectacles, frightened out of his senses by phantom forms or phantom voices, is not the man for the post. He must be master of himself, able to see with his own eyes, to trust the correctness of his own judgments, to hold his own in the world.

Unless a man has self-command, or can at least acquire it by discipline, he is unfit to be God's watchman. The nervous prophet, the self-deprecating herald, the apostle who allows himself to be overborne by the clamour of the world, stultifies his own mission and does not a little to discredit his message.

Self-possession is often a secret of success in common things. In not a few pursuits the cool head and uniform self-command are essential to life itself. The man who works at a perilous post on the wharf or in the shipyard, the signalman, the porter who has to cross the line when trains are coming in opposite directions, the commander of the iron-clad, the surgeon who undertakes grave operations, the advocate who has to win a verdict, must be alert for every emergency, able to mobilise the wits at a moment's notice, apt to deal with the unexpected, or, in other words, must have presence of mind. In fact it would be a crime in such cases to lack the habit, and it is a duty to have it. Sooner or later occasions come to all of us when everything turns upon having ourselves well in hand, never allowing the lapse into momentary forgetfulness, inhibiting the mind or the senses from being shocked into inaction. A man must have confidence in the art he has assumed, and in his own aptitude for applying the principles of his art, and above all in the truths to the promulgation of which his art is contributory. He who has a modest faith in his own resources, be they natural or spiritual, will inspire some degree of that same faith into others. If the actor in important events is discomposed, agitated, ill at ease, whilst entering upon his work, not only do observers find themselves infected with the same temper as they watch him, but they tremble for the results. The man who cannot command his own faculties at the moment, never inspires confidence, however vast the stores of knowledge and power with which popular rumour may credit him. It is the working capital in actual view which assures the onlookers rather than the unrealisable assets.

We cannot persuade others till we are so absorbed by the subject-matter of that persuasion that all the powers of the mind rise up to emphasise it. The duty of self-command implies very much more than subjecting our bad passions to the control of the will; and if we do not learn self-command in the widest possible sense of the term we inevitably weaken our effectiveness for good. By fluttered moods and weak, indeterminate accents, the wisest man is just as much disqualified from swaying others as the ignorant or the imbecile. This lack of robust self-collectedness makes some men ciphers who might be factors of surpassing potency. At critical moments they cannot bring their faculties into action. When the occasion comes their thoughts seem to crack and sink from under them like rotten ice. Coherence goes, and the prearranged demonstration flies into the frailest shreds and splinters, or totally disappears. Nervous embarrassment, inability to bring our best gifts into use at the call of a providential opportunity, palpitations, sinkings of spirit, hesitancies seem to turn our message into farce and dumb show. Again and again we find ourselves unfit to interpret and courageously ring out the message of God's will, and others intuitively know our unhappy secret. God wants us for vessels in which this treasure shall be carried, but we allow ourselves to break up into a handful of potsherds, and men are not accustomed to think that potsherds carry precious things. Who of us has not been made to feel that this is a source of lifelong weakness and discouragement? For lack of self-control, however richly dowered for service we may be, we are in a position like that of the commander in a campaign, one-half of whose forces are

mutinous or have been shut up by some flank movement of the enemy. One faculty which we can quietly use at will for practical ends is better than a brilliant host of faculties which are not under perfect control.

Self-possession is a sign of the quietness of faith. When attained by spiritual processes it becomes a voucher for that trust in God, which once learned in His immediate presence extends to the daily fulfilment of the tasks He has fixed Without this tranquillity which grows from faith we can have no power. We need to be assured not only that we are accepted for the Divine service, but of God's good pleasure likewise to uphold us in our work. There can be no confusion or embarrassment where this fixed persuasion exists. The man who is bold at God's command is bold because authority is behind him, and authority means the mighty grace which will not suffer its obedient instruments to be confounded or brought to shame. The consciousness that God is working through every part of the mind will help to keep every part of the mind in orderly and undistracted co-operation. Trepidation implies a suspicion that some power of either earth or hell is moved against us, and that the power which thus menaces our efficiency is greater than the power which is enlisted on our side. Sacred work is more or less discredited by distraction and soul-relaxing fear, for these moods are symptoms of guilty mistrust and unfit our sacrifice for the Divine acceptance. A true faith should enable us to wield our finest powers for God and His service.

It is well to honour man as man, but that honour must not be perverted into an idolatry of rank, power, prestige, which debases our independence and incapa-

citates us for service. Respect for the opinions of others should never lead us to cancel ourselves and the contents of our own consciences. A silly and gratuitous veneration is sometimes cherished for the mere clothes which deck those who are made of the same clay with ourselves. Sidney Smith once said, that when dining with a dean such was his habitual nervousness, that he was accustomed to crumble his bread with one hand, and when dining with a bishop he performed the same feat with two. The banter of a society wit must not be taken too seriously, but such infirmities would rob of every trace of kinship with Hebrew prophets. We need in our work a self-collectedness which is never nonplussed by pomp and parade. We are sometimes dazed into an ignoble surrender of ourselves and all that God would teach through us. The chased hare, it is said, may be brought to a dead stand by the sudden shouts of its pursuers, and some of us seem to be so constituted that the hue-and-cry of inane worldlings, the chorus of anonymous press writers, the prance and bound and swagger of lordly pretenders at our heels stupefies our souls and roots our very feet to the earth. Amazed and overborne, surprised into paralysis, and browbeaten out of our self-command, we are disqualified for the best duties of life. Without the cool mastery of his own faculties, a man can neither learn all he is meant to learn in God's presence, nor impressively teach others. It is no shame to us that we are stricken, dumfoundered, unable to keep a tight rein over our thought and emotion, when vivid visions of God burst upon our souls; but it is a reproach to us that we should be terrorised into uncertainty, hesitation, dim discern-

ment, and feeble testimony by undue deference to the world. The homage we pay to wealth, learning, social status is so abject that our personality, with all its powers, convictions, insight, and responsible inspirations is brought to the vanishing point. Heretical forms of worship other than those of Buddhism may land us in the half-way house to a new Nirvana-like self-emptiness, and deprive the world of good that should have been achieved by the impact of our unimpaired personality.

Some forms of self-possession are not reached through heedfulness of the Divine voice which bids us trust and be ourselves, and they repel us. We meet now and again with blatant, loud-talking persons who have never had to struggle against tempers of oppressive diffidence, and who are rarely at a loss in the presence of their fellows ; and their imperturbability arises not from the fact that they trust God with peculiar fervour, but they esteem themselves worthy of every confidence, and that temper seems to have been ingrained in them from the beginning. Such men rate themselves as Titans of the purest caste, and eye the planet and all its contents as though it were a mere wren's nest whose little fledglings they may venture to despise. Their self-possession rests on overweening conceit, and they have a happy blindness to the learning, virtue, and experience which surround them, and, indeed, an ill-disguised contempt for such things. With brow of brass, clattering tongue, and speech of unhalting volubility, they reprove, instruct, and exhort without the faintest sense of misgiving ; but behind their loudness, and indeed the secret cause of it, there is an incalculable store of ambition and dense audacity,

united to a frivolous estimate of the talents bestowed upon mankind at large. The set determination to make themselves heard, to shine to the top of their capacity, to succeed at any cost, enables them when occasion offers to do more than justice to themselves. No struggle or agony of self-discipline has contributed to the result. We feel at once it is the impudence of the charlatan which is before us, and not the God-fed firmness and courage of the prophet. We recoil from egotism, self-advertisement, the dogmatic cock-sureness which is scarcely distinguishable from the crow of conceit; and our haunting fear of being blatant may sometimes make us forget the duty of self-control, and so far diminish our power of bearing effectual testimony to truths the world needs. We must have self-command, but self-command acquired by different methods from that. The strength and boldness we need in speaking for God must, in many cases, be built up from their very foundations on religious principles and experiences. The man whom nature does not help, and who through super-human influence alone grows bold and at ease, will far surpass the other in effectual service for God.

It may sometimes happen that in the physical life there is a barrier to that self-possession which is a prime condition of usefulness, and in one case out of a hundred the barrier may be insurmountable. Excellent and high-principled men and women assume too readily that they are the victims of nervous disorder, weak circulation, faintness. When they have something to say which really ought to be said, the brain gets confused, the heart comes into the mouth, the pulse rises to fever height, and the power of utterance fails. Here and there such physical

incapacity may actually exist, but do not let us lightly put ourselves into this valetudinarian category or discount our possibilities of rare usefulness. God's family is not quite so *rickety* as the plaints sometimes heard in His household might lead us to suppose. We may learn a manly mastery of ourselves which will make us worthy channels of God's message. The mightiest of the apostles had sometimes to do his work "in weakness and fear and much trembling," yet recognised an ideal and an obligation to preach the Word "with boldness."

Let God's imperative "Stand upon thy feet" help us. It is a Divine voice which calls us to mental collectedness, to the quiet use and control of all our hidden gifts. He would fain rescue us from our frailties, from proneness to mental confusion, from undue awe of the face of our fellows, from that nervous paralysis which so often has its roots in a morbid or a defective religious life. It is not His will to have servants who lack the note of courage, competence, effectuality. He does not desire that we should be oppressed by the vision of His own majesty, much less by the specious shows of the world and the glamour of a fashionable sciolism. His Word speaks, "Stand upon thy feet"; "Answer me with girt loins like a man"; "Take breath"; "Fear not"; "Be still." Never let us grovel before the face of our fellows, and discredit our work by palpitating dumbness. The Most High wants us to be at ease in His own presence first, and then in the midst of a proud, uproarious world. Our task may be grave, opposition clamorous and widespread; but let us be calm. God comes to bring virility, fitness, large endowment, and not atrophy and mental inanition.

By contact with God we shall gain steadiness, confidence of touch, impressive self-mastery for our work. "Now when they beheld the boldness of Peter and John . . . they took knowledge of them that they had been with Jesus." If we learn presence of mind before God we shall find little difficulty in maintaining it before men. To achieve self-command when the majesty of the Most High has overwhelmed us is a stupendous task, but a task in which we are helped by the remonstrance and the gentle expostulation of the great Lord Himself. He gives commensurate help. He is no tyrant who wishes to devitalise us and make our knees smite together, no imperial brow-beater who intends to despoil us of our best mental forces. He seeks to lead us quietly into courses of holy reason. He looks with sympathy upon all our efforts to grasp His being and to interpret His will. The pattern of a man speaking to his friend He makes the law of His intercourse with us, tempering His most stupendous revelations to our infirmities. His influence over us is that of reason which begets reason, and of love which begets love. And when we have learned this great task of commanding ourselves in His sacred presence, making our best powers obedient to His intimations, we ought to maintain the habit in the presence of those to whom He has sent us, and speak His message with calm and unfaltering confidence. God Himself calls us to manly self-possession before His face, that we may illustrate the lesson thus learned in daily service and testimony amongst our fellow-men. "Wait on the Lord, be of good courage, and He shall strengthen thine heart; wait, I say, on the Lord."

VIII

OBSCURE SERVICE AND THE INFINITE OUTLOOK

"Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth and one convert him, let him know that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death and shall hide a multitude of sins."—JAMES v. 19, 20.

IT is practically certain that the writer of this Epistle was James, the brother of our Lord, who was not one of the twelve, and became an assured believer after the resurrection. Many things in this singular Epistle agree with that assumption. The austere ethic accords with the traditional character of that remarkable man. There is no allusion to the Divine sovereignty of Jesus Christ, no reference to His sacrifice, and no assertion of His place as Mediator at the right hand of God. In the title Jesus Christ, "the Lord of glory," there may possibly be an indirect hint of His superhuman rank. The family relationship in which James stood to Jesus may have compelled the reserve upon this latter subject, maintained through the five chapters. Had James set himself to emphasise such doctrines, it might have been alleged that he was writing under the influence of clannish partiality and family pride. At the same time there are more free quotations from our Lord's discourses

than in any of the Epistles, implying a close and early acquaintance with the young prophet of Nazareth.

The experiences of James as the presiding elder of the Church at Jerusalem seem to be dimly reflected in the Epistle, and perhaps determine the form of the two closing verses as well as the inscription of the first verse. He here calls for individual effort, and insists upon its priceless value in the kingdom of God. The solitary wanderer must be sought by a solitary shepherd, and whoever will may be that shepherd. His memory went back to the first days of Christian history, when the words of a handful of fire-baptized apostles added thousands to the Church in a single day. But those days were long since past. Storm after storm of persecution had burst, scattering the apostles and their adherents through far-off provinces and empires; and whilst the Mother Church at Jerusalem was honoured and had a prestige scarcely attaching to other Churches, it was harried by unsleeping oppressions, and minished and brought low by a perpetual exodus to the uttermost parts of the earth. Such was the community over which it was the lot of this stern and righteous man to watch. Perhaps large gatherings in which hundreds and thousands could be simultaneously swayed to faith were no longer possible; and persecution at this sacred centre, as well as amongst the brethren of the dispersion, may have hindered many who did run well. In the various colonies addressed by letter there were fallen disciples to be restored, as well as the outside ignorant and erring to be instructed and won. Under these changing outward conditions James would feel that the future prosperity of the

Church in Jerusalem and in the far-off settlements to which his believing countrymen had migrated must turn more and more upon the private effort and enterprise of individual disciples rather than upon the herculean strength of those who were officially designated to the work of teaching and ruling in the household of God. And yet, after all, opportunity was not so limited as it seemed. The intolerance of the world can never narrow the range of influence possible to a zealous and faithful Church, for before unpretending individual effort there is an infinite outlook. Obscure and unofficial evangelism may yield results of incomprehensible grandeur. The recovery of a single soul to uncorrupted faith is a work pregnant with spiritual significance, and such work may be achieved by the lowliest. Immortal history may be made in an age when the fortunes of the Church are apparently decadent. In the closing words of this letter, James challenges the common discipleship to this holy emprise, just as at the conquest of Canaan Caleb summoned any man in the hosts of Judah who had the heart and sinew for the exploit to go up and capture Kiriath-sepher. The thrones and crowns are not assigned beforehand, and whoever can effect this work shall inherit the blessedness.

It is perhaps a part of the Divine plan that *the work accomplished at the beginning of new movements by the heroic few should afterwards be committed to the hands of the many.* Indeed it must be so, or the Church would remain an exclusive oligarchy to the end of time. Through the early years of its history the Church must necessarily be taught and ruled by the few, for over the first generation of converts the missionary has an authority which is rooted in the nature

of things, and which no right-minded man would ever set himself to usurp. But unless growth is arrested the Church which begins its days as an oligarchy will evolve at last into a commune. And in harmony with that process the work once done by a band of elect leaders must be taken up by the multitude. In Old Testament times, to restore those who had wandered and impart the benediction needed for the quickening and building up of the spiritual life was the sole prerogative of a caste of priests. But under the better covenant the exclusive has given place to a common priesthood. And the power of the prophet, which followed that of the priest, broadened itself out in its historical development by the same law. God's work, it was once thought, must be done by men of peculiar endowments, born to the very end of stirring the hearts of the multitude, and by such presuppositions the unofficial disciple was shut out from a place in the ministries of the kingdom. But events compel us to revise our notions upon such matters, and it is well. The warfare of the ancient world was carried on mainly by picked champions, who engaged in single combats, the issue defining frontiers and settling the right to thrones; but now the nations themselves are armed, and in some lands every adult man is liable for service. The work of winning wanderers back to truth and godliness and vindicating Christ's crown rights over human souls, can no longer be done by chosen apostles, picked reformers, conspicuous evangelists. Doughty representatives of God's hosts can no longer solve in some wholesale fashion, the critical issues that start up before us as we remember that the world lieth in the wicked one. Israel itself must become an armed camp, and he who does

nothing for the recovery of a lost or erring brother should be slow to claim the Christian name.

Times come round when *those who are fitted to inspire and direct widespread popular movements vanish from our midst.* The dearth of representative men in every sphere of life seems to occur in cycles. Outstanding figures in the Church and in the world become fewer every year. Perhaps the slackened demand explains the meagre supply. In parliamentary life the nimble business mind is wanted rather than the sonorous periods of the orator and the rhetorician. The glamour of stately and laboured climax is overpast there, and will be overpast in the country at large when the same level of education is reached. And such changes are not altogether evil, for there is often a tyranny in the leadership of the voluble few which tends to overshadow and suppress the gifts of the many. Notable and persuasive men appear when new chapters open in the fortunes of the race, but it would be a calamity if the succession were to be unbroken. In crossing the Rocky Mountains, so gradual is the ascent, and uptowering peaks are so rare, that the railway traveller is scarcely conscious of the rise, and might think himself upon the plain all the time. And the average level of intelligence, fitness for service, capacity to face the hour and its problems, are so steadily rising, by slow gradations it may be, that bold and incontestable ascendency is not so easy or so frequent as in bygone times. And this is true in religious life and enterprise. Thousands and tens of thousands are becoming equal to the work once achieved by picked leaders of historic renown, and the power to influence multitudes, which belonged to the rare few, is now distributed amongst the

rank and file. As in the Church over which James watched, although for widely different causes, outstanding apostles and prophets disappear, and those who have wandered must be brought back, not by the trumpet-voice of a consecrated Demosthenes, but by the pleadings and persuasions of the many. We have to be content to win one here and another there, and some of us scarcely dare venture to hope that we shall lead troops of prodigals back to the Father's house.

But that is only one side of the question. For many reasons *men are not collectively influenced* so readily as they once were. They will run together in huge numbers for a football match, a horse race, or a political meeting which bids fair to be animated ; but where religion comes into the question they are no longer gregarious. They do not flock "as the doves to their windows" for instruction, prayer, and religious revival. The parts of the country inhabited by the Celtic races are perhaps the only localities where men are still susceptible of being moved in masses. It may be that many of our fellow-citizens reason more upon religious subjects and feel less, and reason is a faculty which can be best exercised in solitude, whilst emotion is a social faculty, and is exalted and intensified when it runs through the circuit of a crowd. It may be that the crowd has lost its common susceptibility rather than that the man who can move the crowd has become an extinct type. If this be so, there is the more urgent reason why the gifts and ministries of the many should be brought into use, so that the work once accomplished by magnetic leaders may be achieved by the separate zeal and brotherly kindness of all who bear Christ's name. If there are

no fiery Peters to lead men to repentance by the thousand, there are hosts of unknown disciples who can go into the obscure bypaths where faithless and unhappy men and women are straggling, and repeat and multiply Peter's pentecostal work.

Many things perhaps have combined to lead up to the providential turn in history at which responsibility for the restoration of the lost must pass from the few who have public gifts to the many who can speak and exhort in the more private spheres of life. *The conditions of town and city life have changed men* and made them more or less unresponsive to the influences that are directed upon multitudes. The inner life of our neighbours is often isolated and self-contained. There is less solidarity of thought and emotion than in the small compact communities of primitive times. When they turn their backs upon the fresh morning dew of the country fields men often leave behind them the fresh, tender spontaneity of soul which characterised their opening years. We may be ready to think that life in the crowd helps to remove eccentricity of speech and custom and reduce men to a common term. And in some respects that is so. But as a rule men look upon the city as the place where they can best assert their independence, and they find there a liberty not easy to maintain in the village. The migrations due to the ebb and flow of trade tempt many to observe an attitude of strangeness towards each other. Struggle makes men selfish, and the maxim, "Every man for himself," becomes a habit of thought, and often closes those subtle avenues through which the reciprocations of sympathy should flow. Familiarity and mutual trustfulness are the ruling notes in village life, and the spirit of the

early commune lives, although its memory has passed away. Men go almost at will into each other's houses, and often pass with scarcely less freedom into each other's hearts. But the bolt, the key, the secret ballot are the insignia of city life. Men do not obey common currents unless impelled by their grosser passions. Whilst they become assimilated in speech and outward behaviour, new differentiations of taste and thought arise, which go to the roots of the character. The veiled genius behind modern history seems to have set itself to produce varied human types. Men read different books, and if the standard of culture is not high enough for the book, they read different newspapers. The literatures of adjacent countries bring contrasted hues into our thought. New racial characteristics disseminate themselves. Opposite sides of the nature are trained, and men are not attuned to the same key. The same note of appeal does not reach them. They enjoy being in minorities and hate the idea of moving in herds. This may be only temporary, but for the time being the psychological change is unmistakable. The crowd is no longer tremulous and responsive to the same religious impulses. If this be so, and if men are not to be won to righteousness in scores and hundreds at a time, all the more reason why they should be dealt with one by one.

These changes in the conditions under which God's work must be done are part of a providential plan.

By invoking the help of the many in the recovery of those who are astray, *God wants to spiritualise the ambition of those whom He has honoured in the past*, and to keep them lowly of heart. The man who can

allure to contrite tears and enthuse the multitude is often tempted to the undue love of power. His very gifts likewise make him a peril to others, and the man who seems to be able to dispense the Holy Ghost will always have a Simon Magus or two at his elbow, seeking to peer with sordid glance into the secret. Even saints enjoy the exercise of power—the power of persuasion, the power of government, the power of creating a half-worshipful following. An apostle, in the cruder stages of his history at least, may not be entirely free from the lust of pre-eminence, and the lust may come back again in his maturity. He wants to make history that will be chronicled now, as well as appear in eternity; and the man whom God has called and used may get into a habit of looking for his success in visible rather than invisible spheres. He likes to be known as a born leader of men, and to do his work upon a scale that will strike the imagination. Now because God wants to keep those endowed with the talent of moving the multitude from pride, he crowns with the same success private fidelity and persuasion. By making the zeal of an obscure disciple effective as the work of a public evangelist he destroys this temptation. It must be a part of the Divine purpose to make the work of converting men a universal gift in the Church, for not only will the man who has reaped much success in the past be thus saved from thinking of himself as a prodigy, and from being spoiled by undue notice and publicity, but the redemption of the undivided race will be brought near. The valiant will be as David, and David as the angel of God, and the world will be recovered from its long apostasy by this widespread confederation of strength and enter-

prise rather than by the brilliant exploits of select and valorous chieftains.

God puts the burden and honour of this holy work upon the many *to save them from the discouragement* which is inevitable in the decades when success seems to be achieved by rare instrumentalities. It is not the Divine will to crown with notable prosperity only the few who with a trumpet tongue call men to repentance. In many spheres of life the feats of half a dozen men tend to depress and overshadow the energies of a thousand. The feeling sometimes grows up in the Church which prevails in the world, that great opportunities come only to a man here and there, and many capable of great usefulness begin to think that it is not worth their while to hope and toil and fight; for the chances of effecting much are against them. But the opportunities for reaching spiritual distinction are more nearly equal than we assume, and God often seems to go out of His way to put honour upon lowly and unobtrusive religious work. Within the last twenty-five years the quiet labours of those who teach the young, work in humble mission-rooms, and improve every fitting opportunity of testifying to the power of the gospel in the world, has added more to the membership of the Churches than pulpit appeal. We must not draw invidious comparisons between the worth of the varying types of service with which the Christian Church is enriched, but times come round when God sees fit to put special honour upon agencies that have not had their due meed of sympathy. We complain because there are not galaxies of conversions in coliseums and amphitheatres under the eyes of the world, whilst, as a matter of fact, lost souls are being hourly brought back

again by the undertones of the home and in secluded nooks and byways. God wants all to be valiant and to help the victories of righteousness, and has not so planned the field that all the honours fall to a favoured handful of His servants. And it is like His wisdom to encourage the many, otherwise the old prophecies will never be brought to pass. A century and a half ago there were perhaps scarcely a hundred men in either Church or Dissent who were spiritually fit to do any part of the work accomplished by Wesley and Whitfield, and God gave these evangelists the ear of the multitude through the length and breadth of the land. But there are hundreds of thousands of believing Christians in our Churches at the present hour who, through their united efforts, are capable of repeating what those valiant men did with but few to help them, and God wishes to encourage the average worker in His cause. If every true follower of Jesus would accept this common challenge a moral revolution unparalleled in the history of the past would be achieved, and the blessing to the world would be greater than the gift of twenty Wesleys or Moodys or Spurgeons.

We may find another reason for the changing conditions of service in God's kingdom if we remember *the conspicuous place He wishes to give to character, and its outradiating influences in the salvation of the race.* The man who moves many by his word is dependent to some extent upon natural gifts and aptitudes, and cannot bring those who are captivated by his public efforts into intimate contact with the most sacred forces of his personality. The people know him through current sketches of his history and work rather than through the intercourse of private life.

If he is used for enduring blessing to his generation he must of course be a consecrated man, but many of those who listen to him have not first-hand knowledge of what he is, and cannot feel the leaven of his goodness as they would feel that of an equally devoted neighbour. Character, after all, is the greatest factor in converting men, and we can all bring that to bear upon those with whom we are in immediate contact. Perhaps we never feel the urgency of consecration and high spiritual attainment, till such things are seen to be indispensable qualifications for restoring those who have fallen. He who seeks to bring back a wanderer has entered upon the pursuit of holiness, if he understands his work and its requirements; and in opening this great door of opportunity to every one of us God lays upon us a renewed obligation to be holy. We must be pure, unspotted, in fellowship with the God of light if we would bring back into light those who have stumbled into darkness and defilement. The Church will never be as holy as it might till it takes up the challenge of James and in its undivided membership bestirs itself to save men from the error of their ways.

And it is but putting this thought in another light when we say that *God's heart is large, and He wants to widen to the uttermost the honour and blessedness of those who turn many to righteousness.* Let us imagine that in two adjoining cities the work of God prospers for a term of years in almost equal degree, but by somewhat different methods. In one city it is reckoned that five hundred people have been brought out of darkness into the light and joy of God's favour, ostensibly by the zeal and eloquence of two or three famous missioners. The

same result has been achieved in another city, but each of the five hundred converts has been won by a separate worker, as Andrew brought his own brother Simon to Jesus. In which case is the greater blessing conferred? In the one case the joy of harvest is shared by two or three evangelists and their little coteries of coadjutors. In the other case it is diffused sweet and pure through hundreds of praiseful hearts and rejoicing homes. Of course the illustration is extreme, and God wills to bless all effort alike, but when He can engage the many in doing good rather than the few, it is obvious He must delight to employ the many because it makes the benediction large. He cannot wish to narrow the honour of such service and reserve it for the few. As a rule, when He employs famous evangelists to go forth and turn crowds of the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, it is because He finds no fitness for such work in many who call themselves by the name of Jesus Christ.

It is nothing to the Lord to save by many or by few, but if the many are fit the Lord prefers to save by the many, because *the unity of His people is best furthered by that method.* The Church will be one in the best sense of the word when the multitudes who belong to its fellowship come into line and each person seeks to reclaim the stray soul most accessible to him. The unity we need is concerted action throughout the length and breadth of Christendom for the salvation of all who are estranged from righteousness and God. An enterprise in which men are passionately interested never fails to harmonise and consolidate. To seek unity upon the basis of the Papal Supremacy or upon the continuity of the Episcopate so tenaciously asserted for the Anglicans at Lambeth,

so mercilessly poohpoohed at Rome, upon the common ground of any one catechism or confession, is like trying to settle the quarrels of Guelphs and Ghibellines by painting their house fronts the same colour and putting the same pattern of pots upon their chimneys. Enlist them against a common foe and faction will cease. Unity will come from the common action of Christ's disciples, and especially from our co-operation in a great endeavour to turn men from those errors which most obviously blight the soul. It is part of God's plan to bring into exercise the ministries of the many, because the larger the number of those who set themselves to recover the lost, the more solid and enduring will the unity of the Church become, and the sooner will the world know and believe that Jesus Christ is sent of God to be the common Saviour of the race.

But what is this work to which James challenges his readers, and what are the issues it involves? *Bringing men back to truth who have gone astray from it.* The error in view is that of the practical life—falseness of conduct, a departure from the truth of essential morals, or at least a relaxed hold of those special truths which are necessary to the integrity of the Christian life. It is from depraved practices we have to convert men, or from those loose and debased beliefs which tend to lower the quality of the character. Errors of faith are closely akin to errors of life, for they impoverish the motives which are our only stay when we seek to copy Christ. All truth must be tested by its power over the conscience and the behaviour, and that is not truth, in the New Testament sense of the word, which fails to move to true living. The creeds of

the early Councils are sometimes needlessly depreciated; it is possible they may be metaphysical in parts, and therefore more necessary to the salvation of an Alexandrian philosopher than of a practical Englishman. But there is an ultimate creed, few and simple in its articles, which if suffered to fall into neglect and disuse will leave the soul in jeopardy and loss. To take away a belief which is interwoven with man's moral and spiritual well-being, without providing an adequate substitute, is to corrupt the man and lead him astray from true standards of action; and on the other hand to restore him to his lost belief is to restore him to moral and spiritual well-being. The man who suffers from some insidious nervous disease which prevents him from measuring his steps with accuracy, may not be plunged into sudden catastrophe unless he ventures upon the edge of a precipice, but the least aberration is symptomatic of a slow coming mischief that will by and by be tragic.

But what are the gains ensured by such a conversion? *The words of James put before individual effort an infinite outlook.* "He shall save a soul from death." We know what the death of the body means, and it is almost the only aspect of the subject we do know:—disfigurement, loss of vital function, incapacity, unresponsiveness to the natural life which breathes and throbs around it. And such issues many times aggravated are implied in the death of the soul. It is a defacement of the Divine, loss of spiritual function, unresponsiveness to the best fellow ships of the universe, a withering metamorphosis into pain and stony despair. The death of the soul does not imply the cessation of the consciousness,

or we might sometimes desire it, but the paralysis of all that is noblest and most majestic in human nature, a life in death which is bitterer than death itself, the irrevocable fading of the soul out of that realm of light and blessedness where God has fixed His throne and in which the redeemed gather. He who converts an unhappy wanderer from God saves life in the profoundest and most far-reaching sense of the word. To deliver from spiritual death is to turn aside a vast and exceeding sorrow, the shadow of which might otherwise stretch through eternity.

To go astray from the truth involves a man in *complex*, *reiterated*, *cumulative sin*, and the sin of an apostate especially tends to malignant multiplication. Men who want to take the sting out of the threatenings of the Bible sometimes ask, Is it conceivable that God could punish a solitary sin with overwhelming pains? It is a question whether in the history of man there ever has been a solitary sin. A solitary sin would be an unheard-of miracle. Every sin is the parent of an incalculable progeny of sins. Sin is the most prolific thing in the universe, and the sin which propagates itself according to its kind through the term of a soul's measureless destiny is fitly described as "eternal sin." When we recover to God one who has wandered from truth and holiness, God forgives, and the multitude of transgressions is hidden as by the sacrifice upon temple altars. The work that saves the soul is priestly. If you save my child from death you earn my fervent gratitude, and if you save him from a guilt and shame that are worse than death you render me the highest service one finite being can render to another. He who converts a soul saves God's child and hides a

multitude of sins that had engulfed him in shame; and what you become thereby to God, needs the eloquence of God Himself to declare.

This infinite outlook is perhaps put before us as *a compensation for the apparent narrowness of our opportunities.* A new sense of the insignificance of our work seizes upon us as imagination tries to grapple with the numbers packed together in the communities around us. The vision of unending multitudes appals us into helplessness. The world's populations multiply and crowd into the new lands opened up by travel and the expansion of empire; and in contrast to all this, the power of the individual seems to recede almost to the vanishing point. Our uttermost toil is but as a drop of the ocean. It was once much easier to make history than it is to day. For Noah to subjugate and colonise a new world looks like child's play in comparison with our work. The earlier the epoch, the easier must it have been to put some kind of stamp upon the succeeding generations. The older the race becomes the more likely is it to settle into grooves, and to repel the ideas of those who seek to cast its corporate life into better moulds. The sphere of individual influence seems to contract with the process of the ages. Perhaps in religious as in secular things, the age of representative men is past. We are reduced to the necessity of trying to influence for good a mere remnant of those amongst whom our lot is cast, and that too without the prospect of becoming memorable figures in the history of either the Church or the world.

But are we not judging things in the wrong way? We must measure our work on the sides where it

projects itself into eternity. We can all make history, and history of the most thrilling interest. The fortunes of a deathless human soul exceed in solemnity all the epics of the ages, and we can shape those fortunes more profoundly than we think. We must measure a conversion by its spiritual dimensions and turn away from the historians methods of appraising influence. Inspiration must be found not in the social changes which may be effected by the evangelisation of a village or the rehabilitation of a slum or the political quickening of an empire; but in the way a conversion will colour the immortality of him who is the subject of it. If our range of influence is circumscribed, and we cannot contribute much that the Macaulays and the Froudes the Greens and the Justin Macarthys of the next century will think it worth while to mention, a page in God's Book is open to us that we can crowd with sublime subject-matter. When we lay our work down upon the surface of the planet and look at it side by side with swarming cities and far-ranging continents, it seems small as the pin-head poem on a microscopic slide. Two or three unknown men recovered from the error of their ways: a child led into the kingdom before he has strayed many steps from its frontiers. But the light of eternity will reveal the majestic and illimitable magnitudes of work that once looked a mere speck and had scarcely been heard of in the next street. It will be found that we have done more than godless poets, statesmen, kings, for we have plucked men from the brink of the second death, and by means of the work in which God has been our helper, we have covered the multitude of sins.

IX

AN EARLY CHAUVINIST

"And Zillah, she also bare Tubal-Cain, the forger of every cutting instrument of brass and iron. And Lamech said unto his wives:

Adah and Zillah, hear my voice;
Ye wives of Lamech, hearken unto my speech:
For I have slain a man for wounding me,
And a young man for bruising me:
If Cain shall be avenged sevenfold,
Truly Lamech seventy and sevenfold."

GEN. iv. 22, 23.

CAREFUL readers of the Bible will notice that snatches of primitive song are incorporated into its earlier portions. Such quotations are obviously older than the text itself. Before the invention of letters, the history and folklore of a race were more effectually preserved when rounded to rhythmic form and reduplicated structure likely to linger in the ear. It is not inconsonant with a just and sober theory of inspiration that the holy men by whom the Divine Spirit spake should have made use of existing traditions. The special illumination of which they were the subjects enabled them to see the deep significance of the traditions they had received, and to fit them into their proper place in the religious history of the race. These primitive narratives

contain genuine and essential history; but the history is treated with the freedom always accorded to the poet, the allegorist and the teacher by parable.

The story of the first family crime is followed by a brief sketch of the dawn of civilisation, and some uncommonly sagacious and interesting things are told us about it. Lamech's address to his two wives, perhaps the oldest bit of song in the world, exults in the promise of power brought by these new outbursts of human skill. Gifts begin to differentiate, labours to divide and subdivide, and hereditary aptitudes to appear. In one branch of this patriarch's family portable tents of skin had been devised, and the heirs of this craft were henceforth free to move from place to place as need might arise.[1] Without this simple step towards adventure and freedom, the conquest and colonisation of after-days, which changed the very face of the globe, would have been impossible. In another branch of this family the first rude musical instruments were fashioned, and a new factor of power in the life of the future rose above the horizon. And in a third branch the uses of metals were discovered; and the race passed from the stone to the bronze and iron age. Tubal-Cain was the prototype of the Krupps, the Whitworths, and the Armstrongs of to-day. No wonder that this old antediluvian was proud of the versatility and inventiveness of his children and celebrated their talents in a congratulatory song addressed to his two wives. He is the first polygamist of whom we have any record, and his uxorious proclivities may have led him to dedicate this literary venture to the inmates of his harem. Perhaps Adah

[1] Dr. Marcus Dods, "Genesis."

and Zillah had fears and cares about the future fortunes of their children in a hostile world, and this old freebooter puffs away their fears with a boastful little ditty which has been appropriately named "The Song of the Sword."[1]

But the lines express more than innocent pride in the talents of his children. The words are vague and allusive, as though speech itself were in the jerky, infantile stage of its evolution; yet the most casual reader will feel that they hiss and bristle with the spirit of those blood-feuds which were the nightmare of the primitive world before settled governments arose. Jewish commentators held the view that Lamech, whilst out hunting, had inadvertently killed one of his own kinsmen, some of them even specifying Cain himself as the victim of the accident. Later writers, ignorant of the parallelism which rules the structure of the successive sentences, have suggested that a case of double homicide pressed upon his soul and disturbed his fears. Lamech now feels that he will be safe from the avenger of blood. His position will be much stronger even than that of Cain, who was protected by a Divine sign from the lynch law of his contemporaries. It is not necessary, however, to assume that Lamech had the guilt of literal man-slaughter attaching to his person. It is conceivable even that he states a hypothetical case and speaks on behalf of the clan he has founded. If violence and bloodshed should break out in his house, these new forces of civilisation and these brand-new weapons of war will make the house strong against all comers.

This fragment of history is an object-lesson showing *the power of heredity, ancestral influence, and parental*

[1] Dr. Richard Moulton, "Literary Study of the Bible."

training. These forces must have been more tremendous in the beginnings of human life than even now. When men were but few in number and marriage took place amongst those who were not widely removed in blood, the tendency would be to exaggerate rather than to dilute and attenuate the characteristic defects of a race. The subjection of son to father, moreover, was so absolute that little or no scope was left for the development of different types of character. That is why the Bible sometimes describes in the same terms a man and his offspring for many generations. To characterise the ancestor was in nine cases out of ten to characterise the tribe. In the fifth generation from Cain we find the brutal and violent temper which desolated the first earthly home reasserting itself, as well as the dissatisfaction with God and God's ways which seethed in the first worshipper as he stood frowning by a bloodless altar, without any sense of Divine favour in his soul. Indeed Cain's own descendants seem to have looked upon their forefather as a more or less injured man, and obviously resent the coldness and antipathy with which surrounding families had treated him and his seed. It was not pleasant to be looked upon as aliens with a discreditable record. There was a Botany Bay flavour about the name not always helpful to those who bore it. The protection insured to the life of their guilty forefather by a Divine interdict, left much to be desired. The clusters of growing clans which stood aloof from the house of Cain and perhaps reminded them that the shield cast over their progenitor was not the necessary heirloom of all his progeny, are menaced in the song of Lamech with the sharp weapons devised by

Tubal-Cain. Acrimony and passionate feud still rage in this family line, and if the father of these gifted sons has not been guilty of some homicidal act himself, he plainly implies it will be a trifle if his children or grandchildren smite with the fist of wickedness; for this worker in metals has created a monopoly which will make his kith and kin superior to all their adversaries. That will be a better defence than God's protecting sign. The self-vaunting impiety of Cain who obstinately chose his own method of worship, reappears in Lamech, who will no longer confess himself under the slenderest obligation to God, but profanely equips his retainers with these amazing inventions. He can be self-sufficing now and scorns to be for a moment longer a mean dependent on God's throne of truth and righteousness. And thus for generations the temper of the forefather asserts itself in the offspring.

Civilisation is the process which makes the cave-man and the gipsy into a refined and well-ordered citizen. This process is of a twofold character. Laws, institutions, codes of intercourse are adopted which efface the uncouthness and the truculent barbarism of the primitive state and shape and smooth man into fitness for a complex and harmonious social life. To that extent the motive forces of civilisation are moral, and this idea is uppermost in the etymology of the word. But the term suggests other things to our minds. We think of a huge network of inventions devised by human wit and wrought out by human sinew—the agencies called into existence to facilitate man's converse with his kind, to lighten the burdens of toil and reduce the risks of disaster, to make life and property safe, and,

if needs be, to wage war for these ends. We think of mills, factories, exchanges, hospitals, post-offices, shipyards, railways, telephones. We class as half savage the nation which lacks steam, electricity, smokeless powder, the Maxim gun and the Winchester rifle. In fact we worship our civilisations as men once worshipped sun, moon, and stars, and those who are outside the pale we rate as infrahuman. We speak of the Christian civilisations of the West as though Jesus Christ and George Stephenson were equal helpers of their triumphs.

It is an instructive fact that *civilisation was cradled in the line of an impious and reprobate race*, and that till Christ's coming into the world and for centuries afterwards, its secrets were the monopoly of nations corrupt, pride-drunk, idolatrous. Scions of the house of Cain the fratricide first thought out methods of weaving, musical instrument-making, smelting and forging metals. The line of Seth who took the place of the martyred Abel seems to have occupied itself in a life of idyllic simplicity, intent upon the cultivation of piety, tenacious of the great promise of a deliverer from sin, calling upon the name of the Lord, and nursing the world's first groups of believing worshippers. The line of Cain produced inventors of renown, but that of Seth nothing better than saints; and the fact as recorded in these early Scriptures is sufficiently suggestive. Alas! to some extent civilisations are godless still, although through no law of universal necessity. They are exploited by worldlings and present temptations which are sometimes too strong even for the faith and the simplicity of the saints. Men like Robert Owen, Laurence Oliphant, Count Tolstoi, and to some extent John

Ruskin also, have convinced themselves that much in our civilisations is inherently evil, and that better days will be possible only when we revert to those severely natural conditions in which the race was cradled. The environment of modern life is artificial, oppressive, stifling, unhealthily elaborate. Probably we do not agree with such thinkers, and yet at the same time we cannot help feeling that our civilisations have yet to be captured by the saints and made less like castles of gruesome cruelty and torment.

Attempts are sometimes made to prove the Divine origin of Christianity by pointing to the wonderful civilisations which have grown under its protecting shadow. And Christianity certainly does refine and humanise the institutions of the Western world, giving us less ruthless and haughty social politics than those which once flourished on the banks of the Nile, the Euphrates, and the Tiber. But if the argument is valid for the latest centuries of the world's history, it is valid for the earliest likewise; and what would the argument have proved in the lips of an antediluvian controversialist? It would have proved that the children of Cain possessed a nobler temper than the children of Seth, and had as their birthright extraordinary tokens of the Divine favour and approval; which would have been notoriously against the facts. The descendants of the man whom Providence gave to take the place of the martyred Abel, kept alive the traditions of a pure and undefiled worship, and had the same clear sense of God's smile as the first shepherd priest beside his slaughtered lamb. The genius of primitive civilisation as expressed in this ballad of the protopolygamist was akin to that of the unjust judge at a later epoch who "feared not

God, neither regarded man." The transition from the stone to the bronze and iron age took place within the tents of a tribe that had little faith in a Supreme Being and looked with jealousy and disdain upon all surrounding tribes. The migrations initiated by one of the sons of Lamech, up even to the present hour, are not all tracks of light, and the missionary of vice and drunkenness is as conspicuous in the caravans of pilgrims which are moving into new countries as the missionary of the cross. Music, whose new-born strains were first heard in another branch of the antediluvian family, is not wholly hallowed to sacred or even moral uses. It is often employed to inflame the worst passions of war, and in our licensed music-halls when not wedded to lewdness is the hand-maid of a screaming and imbecile vulgarity. It is a question whether the modern world is a gainer through those gigantic armaments which are assumed to make life and property, trade and commerce absolutely safe. The latest civilisations have not entirely escaped the vicious tempers imported into the first, and wait to be Christianised.

Lamech's song of exultation over the new arts springing up within the families of which he was the patriarch breathes *the spirit of contempt towards God the Maker and Judge of men.* He who ever tempers judgment with mercy had given a sign by which Cain was to be sacrosanct against the unbridled revenges of his contemporaries; but this discontented and implacable descendant of Cain intimates that he has chanced upon something better than that at last. He can do without God and cast off the humiliating sign which had protected his offending forefather against the wrath of his genera-

tion. These brass and iron weapons will be effectual substitutes for God and replace the unwelcome tokens of His guardianship. This scion of the first murderer whose disposition has bred true to that of his infamous, overbearing sire, can fend for himself at last, the toils of cunning sons having raised his special cluster of families above the heads of their contemporaries. Never again will they be hangers-on upon the clemency of the Most High. Lamech can dispense with the God who had looked askance upon Cain's offering and made him an outlaw for his blood-guiltiness, and then, having thrust him out, had cast over him some poor, paltry shield of defence. This half-infidel boast is put on record, and a few chapters later we are told of a judgment that came upon the earth and blotted out the house of Cain and all who had come within the sphere of its corrupting influence; thus teaching how God mocked the pride of the first civilisation, as in the far-off heavens He still laughs derisively at the pride and pretence of the last. A tornado of black, downstreaming wrath burst upon the world against which trump of war, tent and transport service, sword, spear, and battle-axe were alike useless, and Lamech and his proud, God-defying progeny perished utterly.

The lesson runs through the Old Testament and is continued in the New. A tribe, whose worship was pure and simple and whose moral code was high, prevailed against the Egyptians, against the armed and civilised Canaanites, and prevailed at last against the organised and versatile militancies of Babylon and Persia, Greece, and Rome. The sword and the big battalions count for less in the making of history than the devotees of materialistic civilisations suppose.

Invisible as well as visible forces move about our pathway, and the Lord of hosts is not slow to vindicate His name. "They gat not the land in possession by their own sword neither did their own arm save them."

Human nature is ever the same till God puts a new spirit into it, and Lamech's temptation is fatally common at the present time. We are in daily peril of making our civilisations a stopgap for a God whom we do not greatly desire or love. In our veins there runs the blood of that first pair who sought knowledge and power from the fruit of a symbolic tree rather than from the Eternal Himself. We have many points of likeness to those early empire-founders who aimed at independence of the spiritual and the Divine. We are not so far away as we think from the archaic tower-builders who imagined they could make themselves judgment-proof. We turn weary, longing eyes to our arts and sciences and expect at their hands blessings which should be sought on our knees from God alone. Our rosiest hopes, our most intent anticipations set and face towards scientific discovery. The world will be transformed by a new illuminant, a cheap motor, a flying machine, a man with an original patent in statecraft. Not a few of our thinkers rank civilisation before Christianity and esteem it more vital to the world's progress than the belief in God and in God's holy and loving Son. The golden age will come and millennial jubilations ring through the air when the programme of annexation is complete and the network of an ingenious civilisation covers the five continents of the globe. This elaborate and complex tissue of human skill which is about our life counts more for the happiness

of the race than the river of God's pleasures, is a truer refuge from the pains and mischances of fortune than that name which is as a strong tower into which the righteous run.

But Lamech and his sons never did get the elements of a millennium out of their retorts and smelting-pots, and never will. They have had greater success in deluge-making. The course of history mocked the profane boast of this patriarch, and it will be sure to mock us if our trust is misplaced. The races of men grow sadder as they find that civilisations which are the feats of soulless science put dust and ashes within parched human lips, steel chains about weary and wasted limbs, and trample life underfoot with a relentlessness unparalleled by armies. Our arts and sciences and the polities to which they give rise, need to be Christianised before they can bless the world. At present they are as much dominated by the traditions of the house of Cain as by the humane and reverent temper of Seth.

Civilisations hedge us in with artificial conditions under which God's help is less keenly desired, and God Himself is put into an obscurer background of thought. That was the first effect of new and more complex modes of thought in the family of this reprobate antediluvian. The descendants of Cain were clever though godless, and with each succeeding generation relied more implicitly upon their own skill and inventiveness, and less upon the succour and goodwill of the Most High. Their sense of self-competence for the destinies which might await them seemed to swell with every fresh possibility they discovered in soil and forest and rock; and as the defences of Divine providence

were fast becoming superfluous, they no longer felt bound to obey the sacred precepts committed to them as a trust from their forefathers. As men built, fortified and adorned cities, forged and furbished to deadlier edge their weapons of war, and surrounded themselves with more imposing spectacles of art, the God who talked with their ancestors became shrouded from view. Their converse was with surrounding tribes rather than with Enoch's august companion, and by a change that was fatally swift belief waned and they passed from corruption to corruption. And that is the tendency still, although a tendency which may be effectually checked and overcome. Civilisation brings us into a domain where there is not a little to fascinate and daze and bewilder ; but God is put one stage further off from us. We are face to face with the conditions created by strange political economies, supply and demand, surplus and deficiency, production and facilities for distributing that which has been manufactured, with a law of averages, with a stupendous chaos in which it is difficult to say whether design or confusion will predominate. We have only room in our firmament for the founders of polities, great inventors, the swarming agents in the thousand and one processes of a fine-drawn civilisation. The Most High God and His holy laws seem to belong to the gray, tenuous dreams of a half-forgotten infancy. The craft of man is ever hanging new draperies before the eyes and blinding our consciousness to the glorious presence of the Father and Judge of our spirits.

To man in his fallen estate Nature is no adequate revelation, but the veils she hangs before the glory of the Divine attributes are diaphanous in comparison

with those folds of sackcloth woven by our secular civilisations. He who is outside the precincts of an artificial life thinks himself more immediately dependent on the volitions of the Most High than the man who is immured within them. Atheism is one of the maladies of civilisation, and has rarely if ever thriven in a pastoral or an agricultural community. The man who is near to Nature feels that it is God who makes the wind to blow and the sun to shine, the dews to fall and the crops to ripen into sheets of tremulous gold; but he who is walled within our gigantic and sky-obscuring civilisations scarcely realises that he is dealing with God at all. Man's handicraft is on every side and the babel of voices proclaims his genius for organisation and his amazing power as a discoverer of secrets. With veneration not far removed from worship we look upon mighty engines, mammoth bridges, terrific forges, upclimbing steeps of masonry; and the tendency is to exalt man and let God down. Watt, Stephenson, Arkwright, Wheatstone, Faraday, Lord Kelvin, these be thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of mediæval bondage. For the moment we are narcotised and float through nebulous dream realms. But the illusion will vanish. We shall soon leave every shred and thread of our civilisations behind, and confront for ever the spiritual realities which now assert themselves only in broken gleams.

One autumn afternoon, on entering a famous cathedral in Southern Germany, I found scaffolding put up in the windows. The black, shadowy forms of workmen were moving to and fro, busy with alterations and repairs. These dark, featureless figures, looking like so many shapes conjured up from the depths of

Hades, almost blotted out the maze of colours in the windows and made the sacred subjects portrayed there indecipherable. The elongated shadows of scaffolding, and those of the workmen mounted aloft, fell across the pavement and displaced the reflections of the southern windows in the westering sun. Here and there, perhaps, a little handbreadth was left that looked like the broken fragment of a device picked out in faint, flickering rubies and sapphires, emeralds and pearls. And the gaunt scaffolding which civilisation builds within our modern life is not unlike that. The shadows cast by our inventors, our captains of labour, our industrial innovators as they hurry to and fro; the obstructive scaffoldings which are put up inside the larger temple where God dwells, the engrossing operations of those who come between us and the sun as they readjust our economics; scientific, utilitarian schemes of remodelled life for ourselves and others fill with secular glooms the holy place in which we stand, hiding the beauty of the Lord from our vision and blotting out the burning splendours of the nobler realm that hovers around us.

In this snatch of old-world song we have *an illustration of Might rejoicing against Right.* The first jingo music-hall was the tent of an antediluvian patriarch, and Lamech is the prototype of the chauvinists and fire-eating politicians of London, Washington, Paris, Berlin, St. Petersburg. "If Cain shall be avenged sevenfold, truly Lamech seventy and sevenfold." The boast is echoed in a ditty hugely popular some years ago. The writer of that insolent doggerel was a poor, peddling plagiarist who had studied in the school of Cain's unhappy descendant.

Lamech had adversaries both real and imaginary and gave himself warlike airs particularly in the presence of his admiring wives. He cherished the same feeling against society as the descendant of a Tasmanian convict might feel against the colonists who boast a somewhat better pedigree. For five generations the descendants of Cain had been more or less baited and ostracised, and no doubt they had to some extent retaliated upon their contemporaries. But the turn of fortune has come at last and Lamech declares he will be quits with those who have shown him coldness and antipathy. He makes his boast of power rather than of duty, and declares he will score against his adversaries. The implacable anger of Cain is still smouldering within the tribe, and it is worthy of note that the children of the murderer are the first to fashion arms and brandish them in the face of their brethren. Against this tribe so wonderfully armed and civilised there can be no effectual reprisals, whatever the provocation they offer.

And the pride of might against right still asserts itself through all the developments of modern life. The first uses to which men put the forces of a new civilisation are often selfish, brutal, unbrotherly. Skilled chemists and engineers are occupied with the problem of how to increase the power of one nation against another. The greatest railways now projected are strategic; new submarine cables are to provide alternative means of communication in case of war, our diplomatists are always on the alert for fresh occasions of aggrandisement. Wherever we go it is in the temper of Lamech, and we clear tribe after native tribe off the face of the earth. And the domestic side of our civilisation is not all that

could be wished. Whilst poverty and suffering are alleviated in some directions, they reappear like unlaid ghosts. A strike occurs, and the manufacturer threatens his hands with new machinery that will make their service unnecessary. One man is employed in the place of ten, and nine join the casuals at the dock-side or pass into the workhouse. And labour uses the resources of civilisation to organise itself through half a continent, and the battle waged by the sons of toil does not want for zeal or rancour. It sometimes looks as though the watchword of our Western civilisation were Lamech's vengeance of seventy times rather than Christ's forgiveness of seventy times seven.

Unless the genius of a civilisation can be made entirely Christian, it is after all but a mixed good to the race. He who loses his standing in the complex scheme of modern life is more utterly helpless than he who became separated from his tribe in primitive times. Civilisation makes light the burdens of toil which once chafed our shoulders and heals our sores with wonderful skill ; but men had better health and did not need quite so much physic and surgery in the ancient days. The barbarians upon whom the invading Cæsar looked had a better physique and a more wholesome life than the ill-fed, ill-clad, and ill-housed wretches from whom the slum publican draws his revenues. Civilisation is unequal in its action, and enslaves as well as emancipates. It may be either a blessing or a curse ; for the present it is a mixture of the two. The children of Cain, more often than the children of Seth, are stewards of the gains of our industrial and scientific expansions. We call our material developments Christian, and look smugly

satisfied as we assert that the herald of the gospel and the European trader are allies for the betterment of the world. But our civilisation too often represents a compromise with the devil and means the more ingenious and compact organisation of vice, greed, oppression. "Why not call your civilisations by the name of Jesus Christ, and let me pull the strings," says the devil; and so the compact is struck and carried out for generations. He who showed to the Son of God the kingdoms of the world and all the glory of them still keeps his hand upon the raree-show. Moral and material progress sometimes move on diametrically opposite lines. It should never be forgotten that our civilisation is not worth giving to the nations of the world, unless we can pervade and animate it by the spirit of Jesus Christ.

We can never expiate a moral injury inflicted upon a race or a nation by the boons of a meretricious civilisation. It is a little thing to take clocks, musical-boxes, and calico shirtings to a negro tribe if we decimate it with vitriol distilled in Holland or Great Britain and carried under our flag. It is a little thing to give India railways, irrigation works, equal justice, relief in the dark days of famine, whilst our system of excise tends to spread intoxication amongst races which once were total abstainers. If the keeper of a dram-shop had allured your sons to debauchery, the madhouse, and the grave, you would not feel much gratitude towards the brewer who owned the dram-shop, even if he acted as arbitrator for you in a money dispute, opened a drinking fountain in your village, and started a 'bus service to the railway station. You would feel that, after all, he was

the instigator of the man who had destroyed your sons. Civilisation has still to be snatched out of the hands of the murdering progeny of Cain and put under the control of the children of the kingdom. It does not always make for purity, temperance, righteousness, and brotherhood, and the sense of power it breeds may tempt any one of us to forget his responsibility to his neighbour and to God.

The Western world bows in ill-concealed idolatry and self-acclaim before the Babylon of new civilisations it has built. Let us beware of the temper which puts the sum total of recent inventions and discoveries in the place of supreme honour and reveres the cunning of the chemist and the electrician rather than Divine wisdom and truth and righteousness. As a nation we are singularly beset by this infirmity. Our ambitions project themselves upon visible rather than invisible planes. This is the antichrist which is already in the world. But it is a greater thing to diffuse and to exemplify the spirit of Christianity than to make the most startling contribution to the progress of civilisation, or to wrest some deep-locked secret from the heart of Nature. To cherish the spirit of brotherhood and to teach it by a living, winsome object-lesson, will yield a larger heritage of honour in the coming days than to forge new weapons, mix new explosives, and equip a nation to hector it over rival nations. Better be Enoch who, in a godless century, illustrated the rare art of fellowship with God, than Tubal-Cain who built a smithy, taught the trick of civilisations and vanished into darkness. Humanity lives by character, but if that be lacking, it will rot, in spite of the ingenious and marvellously wrought devices that environ it. A

nation, through new accessions of knowledge and a restless spirit of scientific enterprise, may gain the whole world and lose its own soul.

The line of Seth has given to the world memorable saints, lavish benefactors, the one only Saviour from sin and despair; and we are told little or nothing concerning its inventions. Civilisation was cradled in the house of Cain, in tents of blood, in circles of life haunted by accusing shadows and disquieted by echoes of appealing and unsilenced cries; and damning stains are upon the wonderful fabric still. The Red Terror we need most to dread in these last times is an ingenious and incalculably resourceful civilisation, within whose framework there throbs the unregenerate heart of a Cain. The marvellous stores of modern knowledge and the amazing feats of modern skill are not presented as votive offerings to God and the meek service of a common race. Those inventions which sprang up in the line of Cain were futile to redeem a blotted name and to divert the decrees of gathering doom. Let us live like children of Seth in the quiet exercise of the redemptive hope, unoffending disciples of Him who both gave and kept the golden rule. Beware of all alternatives for God. Neither through the wit of man nor in the hidden forces of Nature can we find the benediction which His hands alone can bestow, least of all can we find it in Lamech-like tempers of retaliation. After-history mocks the boast of this primitive chauvinist. The devices of our civilisation will soon be left behind as completely as the baby clothes in which we were attired in far-away days, for they are not the final end of life, and character rather than craftsmanship will make the habitations in which we

shall spend our eternal years. Live simply, peaceably, believingly, and never let the magicians of modern civilisation with their marvellous legerdemain come between yourself and God. Dedicate to His service the new powers of an ever-enlarging knowledge. Take heed lest the sense of God become indurated or overlaid. Defend yourself against the moral perils which lie entrenched in all civilisations, or the enchanted Babylon in which you claim your citizenship will bury you in its overthrow. The pride of brute science may be your ruin, as it was the ruin of the line of Cain and his boastful, aggressive descendant.

X

BONDAGE TO AN IGNOBLE AGE

"Who gave Himself for our sins that He might redeem us from this present evil world."—GAL. i. 4.

NOT a few people who claim to be Christians, and are not altogether unworthy of the name, think only of the far-off issues of the Redeemer's work. In their view salvation is from the woes of a remote future rather than from the contamination, restlessness, and gilded captivities of the present hour. And a desultory style of viewing the Scriptures might almost seem to justify them in their position. The Baptist struck an unmistakable keynote when he spoke of "the wrath to come." Christ's own parables of retribution were for the most part prospective in the terrors they portrayed. Paul himself speaks of "Jesus who delivered us from the wrath to come." It was perhaps necessary to begin with that view, for such is the deceitfulness of sin that in the heyday of its perpetration and before tragic reactions set in, men scarcely realise the misery and mischief it engenders. And when they have lapsed into stupor and settled down in degradation, it may be easier to excite the imagination by delineating "wrath to come" than to quicken drugged sensibilities to a

present apprehension of the wrath overshadowing every opponent of God's authority.

But this view needs to be supplemented by the deeper view that salvation, if it be a process corresponding to the promise of its name, is salvation from all that is evil in the present. There is a danger lest we should live so much in what is yet to be that we forget what is actually taking place before our eyes. "Operating in futures" is an art practised just as much in the churches as on the exchanges where men buy and sell ungrown corn or cotton. With not a few people religion is a speculative transaction for distant dates, and the man who gives himself up to God's service is going in for a lock-up investment, sound of course, but the handsome wisdom of which will be proved fifty years hence. Such tentative pietists anticipate rather than experience, their spiritual life resolving itself into a hope rather than a faith saving from present evil. Paul speaks much of hope, but in his scheme of thought, hope dwells together with faith and love in the same house and is no solitary figure looking out across a shoreless sea. Our religion is not made up of dreams for to-morrow but takes in the urgent problems of to-day. Christ did not give Himself for our sins to save only from hell hereafter, forgetting to reckon with the hells through whose grim circles of disquiet and pain, the dim, moaning millions are daily moving. After uttering his last parables of the "wrath to come," Jesus prayed that the disciples might be saved from the evil of the world, and His prayer was answered through the power of His own cross which effectually separated them from the weltering unregeneracy of the times. In Paul's words the prayer, and the

sacrifice which was the abiding answer to the prayer, are brought into the same focus.

It is a widespread opinion that the most vicious things in the world may be controlled and improved, and that the domain of life which the New Testament looks upon as adverse to God is in no sense a "city of destruction" from which men and women need to be brought out. The very expression, as used in evangelical circles, implies a libel on decent and reputable sections of society, it is said. In answer to that we may admit that artificial and misleading lines are often drawn between the Church and the world. That which ecclesiastics call "elect" and "precious," God may sometimes call "reprobate" and "vile." We cannot put a ticket on every amusement and recreation and say, "This is Christian, and that is un-Christian." We cannot divide up our neighbours and say, "Here are the sheep, and yonder are the goats." But at the same time, if we vigilantly exercise our spiritual senses we shall be able to detect the presence of evil, just as truly as a sanitary expert can smell dry-rot or sewer-gas in a shut-up house. Where the judgments of earnest and sagacious Christians agree in such matters, we may safely accept their verdict. In some decades the world may become complaisant towards the Church and claim to be partly of it. But an evil world there surely is, touching with its seductive influences numberless points of sensibility in our natures, and from that world we need to be saved by Christ's sacrifice just as urgently as from hell itself.

What is this sinister domain? How may we define and identify that world which is the foe of God? It is organised error and depravity, confederated unregeneracy. It is that mass of precedents,

conventions, antipathies bred of the secret antagonisms of the race to God. It is the old Adam ruling by an informal plebiscite: an offensive and defensive alliance against the regal claims of the spiritual life. It is the kingdom whose first law is self-indulgence, in which men are crowned and praised and sung when they do well to themselves. It is the gross residuum with which we have to deal, when the souls responsive to Christ's call have been separated from their fellows. It is the special psychic atmosphere which quickens the seeds of moral contagion. It may be a fashionable set, a club, a society paper, a school of art, a cult in literature. It is party politics disencumbered of the "Nonconformist conscience." It is the environment which produced a Messalina in the first century of the Christian era, and the kind of woman who flutters from morning mass to the midday racecourse in the nineteenth. It asserts its power in every part of the city. It means grimy, grinding wretchedness as well as dress, glamour, and glittering jewellery. Its chief question is, What shall we eat? What shall we drink? Wherewithal shall we be clothed? The one problem absorbs the mind alike under the embarrassment of riches and the oppression of penury, and in both cases is symptomatic. It is Babylon when God's people have fled from it lest they should be partakers of its sins.

It is quite possible *for the world to wax worse and worse*, in spite of the ever-enlarging victories of Christ's spirit. The fact that those who yield their allegiance to Jesus Christ continue to increase is quite consistent with another fact—that as the ages run on, the untouched and impenitent world becomes more

evil and obdurate. The drinking water of some great cities is drawn from the impure rivers on which those cities stand. After the reservoirs have been pumped full from the turgid stream a chemical substance is used to precipitate the sewage and pollution, and clear crystal water is run off into tanks made ready to receive it. Now the more of the pure water you take from the contents of the reservoir, the viler will be the residuum. What John and Paul and Jesus Himself mean by the world, is the obdurate and refractory precipitant left behind when human life has been acted upon by the gospel. As the natures predisposed to good are gathered to Christ, the world must necessarily become more evil. In that sense commentators of a certain school are quite right in the pessimistic view they take of the times immediately preceding Christ's second coming. Do not let us lightly assume that amidst the humane civilisations of these last times, there is no trace or taint or stain of the old world left. The malignant virus which has been working in the human soul for centuries is scarcely even attenuated, and the old rage against God and virtue, the old lust of blood still sleeps in the race. In cities nominally Christian crowds will go to see a boxing match where there is some little chance of physical injury or death, and a magistrate will prescribe to wrangling street boys fisticuffs rather than summonses. Unless we are saved from the world it will bring out the devil that lies low in most of us, and we need deliverance from it just as much as from the pit of darkness itself.

In Christ's view of things, *present and future stand inseparably related*, and He never contemplates a salvation that overlooks the immediate evil and begins

to take effect only in the far-off epochs. Earth and the hell awaiting the impenitent children of men beyond, He saw writhing under one common disaster. The bond holding men to perpetual pain was forged of the same stuff as that which keeps men in subjection to an evil and adulterous generation. In the two circles of existence the same spiritual disease, although in different stages of incubation, was ramifying into corruption and torment. In the far East I have sometimes looked upon the disfigured forms of lepers as I have passed near the villages in which they were herded. Their faces glistened with incrustations of repulsive loathesomeness, their limbs were puffed to unnatural size and in some cases were dropping away, and the trunk had lost all comeliness of line. And I have looked too upon the leper babe, held in the arms of an unsightly mother, with scarcely any patch of disfigurement upon its skin, but with the too sure poison hidden in its veins. Do you not think it was just as much a pain for me to look upon the child in surroundings sure to foster the latent disease, as to look upon the caricature of the human form where the ravage and development of the disease had been unchecked for twenty years? The child might possibly be spared its fate if some benign power would rescue it from the hideous village. Sin here, the sin of which our attachment to the world is the symptom, is spiritual leprosy in its infantile stages; sin confirmed, matured, hideously cumulative in its mischief, branded by God and ostracised by the last sentence of the judgment throne, is spiritual leprosy in the adult stages of its pitiful history. Do you not think that the infantile stages of the leprosy move the springs of Christ's compassion just as much as its

repulsive and inveterate stages in the place of hopeless exile? Moral dissidence on earth is as sad a burden to His spirit, and in the judgment of His far-seeing wisdom perhaps as great a calamity, as moral dissidence in hell. Sin in a soul now is as grievous a thing for Him to contemplate as sin in that same soul a thousand years hence. The bitterness of that life in death would not be mitigated if you were to put those wretches into palaces, surround them with the masterpieces of art and feed them on the dainties of the land. The leper's island in the fair and azure seas of the South holds just as much wretchedness and despair as the lepers' lurking-places on the barren ice-bound shores of Siberia. The sting of captivity and the terror of condemnation are not removed when the cell wall is frescoed, its light beautified by coloured glass, and its door gilded with fine gold. The Israelitish captives in the palaces sighed for redemption just as plaintively as those sweating at slave tasks by the rivers of Babylon. To love the world is to prove that the worst of all poisons is in our life, that we distrust the goodwill of the Father, and that we are minded to obey the dictates of the passing age rather than the counsels of the Eternal holiness; and no sadder spectacle than that is open to the eyes of Him who has the keys of Hades.

Through His sacrifice for sin Jesus Christ seeks *a purified and a regenerated earth*, and not a heaven peopled only by the quenched firebrands, the saved castaways, the picked-up wastrels of Time. Hell is too often thought of as a new destiny, a specific creation of judicial wrath, a place of exile and isolation rather than as a consequence of present unconquered sin. A man will not be saved from the plague by being

carried out of hospital, nor even by being put into an express train and hurried away into a province free from the visitation. Salvation is not a question of transfer from the threshold of one domain of space called "hell" into another domain of space called "heaven." The salvation Christ hoped to achieve, whilst infinite in its range, was first of all from those unholy desires and inclinations which attach us to the present evil world. The doctor in a hospital aims at something more than saving his patients from an order for the incurable ward. In some cases it may be a great thing to do that, but his great hope is that he will pour health and vigour and upleaping vitality into the veins, and send back those over whom he watches to swell the crowds of cheerful, active men and women who are the pride of our civilisation. Do not suppose the soul of Jesus Christ is contented when He succeeds in saving a wretched sinner from the incurable ward. He wants to create a new humanity here and now. He did not offer a sacrifice warranted to take effect only on the verge of a red-hot perdition. No salvation from sin is effected whilst the world holds men and women helpless in its power, and if there is no salvation from sin now it is an affront to God to talk of salvation from those realms in which all intractable sin is to find its last dwelling-place.

It is the same shadow of condemnation which rests upon those who follow the lusts of the flesh and are slaves to the pride of life, in Time and in Eternity; and Christ's work would have lacked consistency if it had only contemplated salvation from wrath in the life to come and from the things which have provoked the long-gathering storm. It is no part of the preacher's

work to tone down the terrors that lie in the future. The pain that comes with reiterated and lifelong wrongdoing mounts to appalling fierceness. We cannot gauge the degrees it may reach with the process of the guilty years ; yet at the same time future pain will be an intensified stage of the present. Many men carry their hells about in sections, just as steam launches and light railways are carried on the backs of porters across the desert and put together in a far-off territory. Wherever they go pride, worldly lust, vindictiveness, remorse, vexation, make them only one whit less miserable than lost souls. The last judgment is simply the putting together into an appalling whole of the pains men now feel in parts. Can it be that Christ wishes to save men from a completed hell at last and not from its constituent terrors now? His heart is just as much touched by the pain men suffer here through their wilfulness and folly as by that which awaits them hereafter ; may we not say more? for He feels towards us in our probationary state just as we feel towards pain-racked children. We reserve a special quality of pity for the woes of the little ones. We do not want specifics that will begin to be effectual when the death struggle has come, but a healing element that will act in a somewhat earlier stage. The man of our choice is he who by judicious arts can check fever, assuage pain, cool the fire-hot brain before death is in view at all. Christ is not honoured when we look upon Him as a Saviour for the last stage in our destiny. He contemplates our salvation now and His cross looks as much to this world as to that which is beyond.

Salvation from sin involves our separation from the world through the power of Christ's sacrifice.

How does Christ's death effect this detachment from the world?

The cross *reverses the spell laid upon our senses* by the fashions of the passing age and subjects us anew to the revived authority of truth and righteousness. Till God's delivering grace comes to men, they live in a state of moral hypnotism and assiduously practise the art upon themselves and each other. They suffer the world to master them by its brilliance, to sway them by its frivolous suggestions, and suspend the working of the higher and better consciousness. The world as it addresses itself to the man who has become its slave, is little like the first wilderness into which the primitive transgressors were driven. A palace of enchantment, rich with turret and architrave, has started up on the wide waste of sand. Its courts are paved with tinted marbles; its halls plash with the coolness of mock fountains; music as of cunning minstrels floats through its alcoves; fruits are ruddy in the green branches that shade the courtyards. The inmates of many ranks and castes are attired in vast pomp of colour; and yet in every breast is gnawing pain. The illusion is evanescent, and fast wears itself out. The fairy scene is a brief besotment, and the dazed dwellers there start with sudden pain and retire into secret places to hide themselves. To some ears the music itself becomes torture, for in spite of the show of mirth and splendour the shimmer of the fevered and curse-bound wilderness is here. The pavements burn the sandalled feet like the sand of the outlying desolations, and fruits fair to the eye are charged with poison. Fountains that gleam like crystal, reek with infection and death. The rich inlaid couches on which the gay inmates recline, con-

cealing their inward pain like Spartans, are comfortless as thorns. From leafy shade and silken canopy and painted ceiling a fierce wrath strikes like a glare from the pit. A patient and undying self-accusation waits to eat into the souls of those surrendered to these illusions. The very soul of hell incarnate in a Belshazzar's feast, and with a rainbow glamour cast about it for a moment—such is the world from which Christ seeks to save us. His cross dissolves the deadly illusion, His love heals the hidden pain, the witness of His sacred blood gives a new reality to truth and righteousness, making men die to self and live anew to God. Christ crucified becomes the wisdom of God to unveil the cruel pretence which lurks beneath the kingdoms of this world and their proffered splendours.

Christ's sacrifice *emancipates us by the law of self-denial and unworldliness which it illustrates* and commends to the conscience. That life began in a renunciation of all that we understand by the world, and the renunciation was magnificently consummated when He gave up His life for our ransom. But it is not as a mere *pattern* of self-renouncing unworldliness that the dying Lord is preached, for it is often the fate of high patterns not to be copied. The law of the cross becomes an effectual obligation only when we have received some vast good through its propitiatory virtues. I may have before me examples of all that is holy and noble and be compelled to admit that those examples are worthy of praise and imitation, and yet there may be no constraining tie of relation between me and the exemplar. I am not placed under any specific individual obligation that moves me profoundly. But when Jesus Christ justi-

fies a man, as He justified Paul by the power of his self-oblation, the law of sacrifice binds itself upon his conscience with an absolutely new force, and he thinks of the cross not only as the symbol of the grace by which he has been delivered from wrath, but as the instrument by which he is crucified to the world. In the light of that transaction all phases of unworldliness melt from the soul like shreds of morning haze before the noonday sun. If we falter in our obedience to this principle which burns itself into every spirit responding to the grace of the cross, may we not doubt whether we are truly partaking in the merits of Christ's death? In the studios of painters who set themselves to depict the cross and passion of Jesus, living models may be seen posing for sketches of the crucifixion. They are held by tapes and pins on dummy crosses to give the artists correct perceptions of limb and muscle and attitude. Some of us are crucified to the world after the method of the artist's models. We are upheld in attitudes of apparent renunciation by the ties of convention, ceremonial vow, religious formality, half-real profession; but we have never felt the piercing pain which brings final deadness to the world and separation from its unholy interests.

Again Christ helps on the process of our detachment from the world by *the sure and certain hope awakened within us by His sacrifice of love.* The cross was the witness of Christ's own belief in immortality, for it was with no temporary accident of human history He dealt by His vicarious pain, but with an evil that threatened to embitter the age-long life of the race. It is easy to think less of the passing age if we are sincere believers in the ages

that lie before us. Not a little of the stubborn, passionate worldly conformity we see around us is caused by a feeble, fluctuating quality of faith in the world to come. The world of the senses seems so much more real than the world of the mysterious spirit, that no wonder the natural man should gravitate towards it and seek to make the most out of its promise. If nothing lies beyond the threescore years and ten, it must surely be weakness to let the present life pass without enjoying its choicest dainties. But a soul penetrated by the power of Christ's death is saved from the unbelief which issues in the worst forms of worldliness, because it recognises that there is an eternal world in which a place is sealed for each of those on whose behalf Christ offered Himself. The immortality of the race is a truth essentially correlated to this infinite sacrifice. No one would take the trouble to redeem a slave who had but a few hours to live. If the death that sooner or later overtakes us all involves personal extinction, Jesus would not have felt called upon to pay the ransom-price, nor would the Father have approved such lavish and wasteful love. If we are not the possessors of a being of deathless faculties, the passion of the Man of Sorrows is a piece of specious and flagrant extravagance. If the cross does assure us that existence will not close with the last breath on earth, it thereby compels us to deny ourselves worldly lusts, to hold with a light hand the things that perish in the using and to live as the heirs of the coming ages. The state of mind scoffed at as "other-worldiness" is scarcely even a decent counterfeit of the state into which Christ brings us by His redeeming grace. His salvation begins at once and whilst in the world we

are lifted above its illusions and recalled from its hopeless and soul-vexing quests.

The eternal redemption has its beginnings as a present experience, and is thus justified against the taunts of the unbelieving generations. Jesus Christ is the impersonation of cool and well-balanced reason and does not ask you to credit the imaginary, for you have been too prone to that already. You are not required to think of yourself or of any one else as saved by His sacrifice from the wrath to come, unless you are saved from the wrath abiding upon every wrongdoer in the present world. You are not meetened for heaven by the gracious influences of the cross unless you have acquired a distaste for occupations and surroundings that coarsen and canker the finest life of which the spirit is capable. There are those, alas! who revel in the thought that Christ's pierced hand has opened the gates leading into realms of everlasting peace, whose hearts seethe with pain, disquiet, sultry gloom, because they cannot get as much of the world as they want. There are those who think themselves fit to stand before the presence of the King in the holy place, and yet business men lift their brows when it is whispered they are officials of a Christian Church. Keen commercial transactions are called to mind that were dictated by worldly greed, and the faces of workmen not paid the best market price for their heavy toil; a glimpse of whose meagre and miserable homes is enough to make a Stoic blush. Those sometimes expect to be companions of "the spirits of just men made perfect" who are fretted by the cares of the world more miserably than their godless neighbours, and who, to quote a famous Scotticism, are "gey ill to live wi'." They are

rare specimens of peevishness, irritation, domineering selfishness. It is illusive to look for salvation from some future hell when we are in no degree saved from the temper of the world that engulfs us now. We are not asked to believe in the salvation of one soul from the wrath to come who is not now saved from the Divine displeasure and who does not show by a sweetened disposition that his spirit is truly possessed by the persuasion of Christ's grand forgiveness. Christ can only save you from the hell that is beyond the horizon by saving you from the hell in whose pitch and mire you stand knee-deep now. All salvation has its starting-point here. If Christ indeed ransomed you from the world at so great a price, do not think of your enslavement to its evil customs as a trifling disability. Let us live as those who are saved from the world by that cross of which we speak so much, and not as though we had a special license to sip its insidious sweets, for Christ's blood has been sprinkled upon us in order that we may be consecrated witnesses against its mischievous illusions.

There is a permanent incompatibility between the service of God and subjection to the world. A story by an American writer describes the perplexing experiences of a little girl whose parents had been divorced, and who, by the decision of the judge, was to spend six months of the year in the care of one parent and six months with the other, turn and turn about. It is needless to say the child was the victim of wretched mystifications, and did not conceive much love for either one or the other. Whilst in the company of her father she had to listen to daily abuse of her absent mother who, in veiled hints suited to a child's capacity,

was described as a monster of iniquity. And when the child passed for the next six months into the care of her mother she had to listen to similar depreciations of her father ; and so the miserable comedy went on from stage to stage. It was obviously impossible for a child under such conditions to have the share of gladness suited to a child and to grow up into faith and contentment and love. By their own choice some people put themselves into a similar position between God and the world ; they can never therefore trust and entirely love either the one or the other, whilst flitting at intervals between the two. There is an irrevocable divorce, and he that would be the friend of the unregenerate world is the enemy of God. It is not for the preacher to make an inventory of the things it is needful to renounce, but some of you know perfectly well that before you can possess the most excellent knowledge of Christ and prove the sufficiency of His redeeming grace, you will have to count those things loss to which you have been holding with a tight grip. There is no salvation possible to us other than that which begins in escape from the present evil world, and this world did not shrink into a dead cinder and rank as an extinct force centuries ago. That loyal and whole-hearted service of God for which Christ cleanses the conscience by His holy blood, is only possible to us when we have been delivered from "this present evil world according to the will of our God and Father."

XI

THE DIRGE OF THE DEAD HAND

"Yea, I hated all my labour which I had taken under the sun; because I should leave it to the man that shall be after me. And who knoweth whether he shall be a wise man or a fool? Yet shall he have rule over all my labour wherein I have laboured, and wherein I have showed myself wise under the sun. This is also vanity." —ECCLES. ii. 18, 19.

WHETHER this book came directly from the pen of Solomon or not, it may at least be looked upon as recording the gist of his confessions and reflecting those incoherent and unstable moods of feeling so often incident to a career of opulence and power. It is a psychological biography on a small scale, not unlike that of Marie Bashkirtcheff, the young Russian lady who studied painting in Paris, and set herself to describe and confess in a remarkable diary all the caprices, egoisms, mortifications, littlenesses, and eager ambition which formed the warp and woof of her inner history. A later writer probably put into shape oral traditions of Solomon's table-talk, or wove into these elaborate soliloquies the jottings of some court Pepys which may have come into his possession. The book needs to be read through at a sitting, or we may mistake the soul-sick reactions portrayed for the stedfast principle to which the preacher leads

the way;—"Fear God and keep His commandments." The sheet anchor of human life is pious heedfulness of the voice which is ever calling to duty; and if we stop short of our grand objective we shall surely find ourselves mastered by a tyrannous sense of the vanity of all toil and service.

Solomon's life was complete from the naturalistic standpoint. He sought pleasure with a zest we should condemn as license nowadays, but which the spirit of those times accounted lawful, at least for kings. And more than that, he gave himself to great and imposing enterprises, seeking diligently the welfare of his people as well as his own personal and family aggrandisement. And yet public work upon an unspiritual plane of ideas could not altogether satisfy him. A man must choose his tasks wisely unless he is to be tortured day and night with distressful quandaries. It is not enough to preach the gospel of work to those who are distempered because the world seems to present no opportunities worthy of their power and activity. Obedience to God, this royal preacher goes on to tell us, is a greater thing than all the splendid enterprises by which he had hoped to perpetuate his name.

We are reminded of the tasks to which this wise king gave himself. He reared palaces, dabbled in landscape gardening, planned aqueducts, fountains, rockeries, was a patron of art and music, spent money on model farms, fostered foreign trade, helped by his munificence the religion of his forefathers. But he had unhappy forecasts of impending change, for the crown prince was not in all respects an ideal youth. His pet palaces would be altered at the whims of coarse successors, his gardens remodelled, his Govern-

ment farms abandoned, and his high-bred cattle sold in the common markets, his statesmanship reversed, his kingdom frittered away, his servants disbanded, his groups of artists and musicians replaced by greedy clowns, his literary remains edited and annotated in a sense ungrateful to his own pride (of which possibly we have an illustration in the treatise before us), his teachings and precepts set aside, and the temple he had built tampered with and at last destroyed. He was haunted in his lifetime by the vision of the clumsy, tasteless restorationist, and he knew full well that the restorationist would soon be followed by the destroying vandal. Already he seems to hear the cry, "The king is dead. Long live the king." And how sick at heart he feels as all the signs tend to show that the next king will be an iconoclast, a reactionary, a fool; or at least a man who does not think in the same groove as his predecessor.

But this weary, dissonant pessimism, like the same temper everywhere, was incapable of judging truly. That which was ignoble in his work perished and deserved to perish. Through change and apparent degeneracy, there were undercurrents of progress, till at last the Hope of the world was born of his own royal line, and an imperishable kingdom set up which did not rest upon material greatness. Solomon played his part in the Providential programme, although it was not so important from the ethical standpoint as that of many workers whose rank in life was less brilliant than his. The true and unselfish qualities present in his many enterprises continued to live when the outward fashion of his sovereignty had passed away. His heart-ache, as he

thought of how much in the scheme he had tried to carry out would be altered by his successors, was relevant only to the lower ranges of his work. But the royal preacher, poor frail mortal! was thinking not so much of his work as of himself and posthumous fame. He wanted to invest his own dead hand with perpetual power; but that is not permitted even to the best of the sons of men.

To many of us the preacher's frame of mind will seem abundantly justified by the facts of life. Through thrift and unflagging toil a man gathers a fortune which reckless and self-indulgent children scatter, and a few years suffice to see the last vestige of his labour vanish. He was accustomed to speak of capital as accumulated labour; but his children think of it as stored-up feasting, revelry, and laughter; and it evaporates like liquefied oxygen as soon as the vacuum jacket is taken away. A man builds up a fair and honourable name for those who bear it; and his children trail that name in the mire and alienate the respect and confidence for which it was once a synonym. After days and nights of minute research the scholar congratulates himself that he has settled some moot point of criticism; and within twelve months of the scholar's death the subject is reopened by an irresponsible amateur. A few years ago the younger scientists said that no principle upon which Charles Darwin had finally pronounced would need rediscussion; but some of his most fervent disciples no longer adopt that ultramontane attitude towards positions once considered vital to his hypothesis. Freedom is won by valiant and unselfish men at the price of pain and blood; and their sons allow themselves to be lightly cozened out of their costly birth-

right. When the topstone had been brought with shouting upon the fabric of the Reformation, it was assumed that the structure was of adamant; but the sons of the Reformers think it lath and plaster, and are trying to pull it down. The greatest empire builder of the century must go down the gangway, bag and baggage, glum as a discharged pilot, and give place to a crowned novice who has chosen to send him about his business. There is little wonder that, as his biographer tells us, "After gazing for a while into space, he complained that he had little pleasure or satisfaction from his political life." No legislation is looked upon as final. Those who have had too small a share in promoting it always see flaws and blemishes to which its foster-fathers were rightly or wrongly blind. Systems of Church administration are constructed or modified, and then, when we have paid our tribute at the grave of our ecclesiastical statesmen, we rush away to reconstruct or supersede their work, and find that it is possible to place a few offsets against the loss caused by their death. A group of men set on foot philanthropies which palliate the social diseases of their time; and their successors think they see a more excellent way of compassing the same end, and great readjustments must take place.

We like to show the lusty originality of our youth by pulling other men's schemes to pieces, and the next generation may possibly return the compliment to our pious memories. It is our way of showing that we are vigorous and up-to-date. In the Western world at least posterity rarely lets the achievements of its ancestors pass unrevised, for however well we may do our tasks some officious upstart will rush to

the front with his patent schedule of reforms. We cannot be otherwise than right. Those before us were wrong, and those who follow us will be just as miserably wrong, for it has been our distinction to possess the gift of approximate infallibility. We think it anomalous to be governed by the dead hand; but all the same we do our best to twist the reins round our own wrists, so that when the flesh has rotted away, we may still control the course of some events. Of course we shall not entirely succeed, and the outlook is immensely discouraging. If our dominion is to be so brief, why not resign ourselves to idleness? Instructive experiences have already befallen us in our little world. The man who prepares to enter into our work whilst we are living tries to improve it as he judges things; and the process will be carried to more significant lengths when we are gone. Oh, that the society for preserving the ancient monuments of our land would extend the scope of its operations and take our life-work under its guardianship, when we are no longer able to cry "Hands off!" to our meddlesome successors! If it would make that a part of its programme, how gladly should we subscribe the conventional guinea! Solomon had precisely the same feeling centuries ago. He longed to stamp his work with finality and ensure it against adjustment and revision. Death would put his enterprises at the mercy of others. He would have been less of a pessimist if he could have seen some way out of this disheartening probability. In wholesome and virtuous activity we find the purest joy of life, and if this also is to prove vanity and vexation of spirit, what have we to live for? Pessimism afflicts the idler, and we feel it is his right

and proper judgment. Is it to be the fate of the diligent and the disinterested likewise? The criticism of the coming incompetents—criticism sure to be followed by bungling reorganisation—hangs over us and sits upon our souls like a nightmare. By and by the upstarts will be at work with sacrilegious tooth and claw upon that to which we have given our careful thought and our devoted service.

It is all very well for us to assume the tone of martyrs who are on the way to the stake, but let us ask ourselves, Does not this resentment of the idea that our work may not have the stamp of finality and absolute perfection upon it imply a defective religious temper? Is it not conceivable that some features of our work should have been manifestly coloured by the arrogance and insufferable ambition cleaving to our personality, and is it not a mercy to us that the glaring colour should be toned down by the handiwork of those who come after us? It may be that we shall gain rather than lose by the process we so bitterly resent; certain it is our work will be the better for these eliminations which seem to abase us into ciphers. In the preacher's lament we can detect a strain of self-idolatry, and self-idolatry is always allied with contempt of our fellows and disbelief of the living God.

I. This dirge of imminent helplessness expresses *the mood of one who has been doing much of his work under the unhealthy stimulus of pride and ambition.* The lust of power speaks in these distempered words—power divorced from fortitude, power so overweening that its coming mortifications showed like martyrdoms. This sceptred sage had no contemporary rival, and was not inured to criticism and contradiction;

but why should such a one as Solomon even flatter himself that all his works were so perfect that they must needs be beyond modification and readjustment? He seems to forget that the present life is chiefly education and apprenticeship. Like the vain schoolboy who wants his first scribbles to be put in the National Gallery and preserved for the wonder of after-generations, he imagines his feats are ideal and that it will be sacrilege to retouch them. He does not realise that he is only a beginner in the school of government and civilisation. Those who paid the taxes in Israel's golden age, and did the bidding of its versatile potentate, were already thinking that the regime he had inaugurated had lasted long enough, and that no popular interests would be served by continuing its traditions after the king had once passed away. There were wise men before him, and wise men were destined to come after him, and he had contemporaries who, if not equalling him in the range of their knowledge, had at least kept themselves from dropping into the same deep abyss of folly and self-indulgence; and yet the great king was under the impression that he was the last of the sages, and that the distinguished race would be no more heard of after his own funeral. We know how groundless this assumption was, for in every age the world has not wanted men whose gifts, acquisitions, and practical sagacity have outmatched those of this much-bepraised king, who was sybarite as well as sage, and who, through untempered success, over-deep draughts of intoxicating flattery, and base polygamistic animalism was spoiled into an ignoble old age. The man who looks upon life from Solomon's standpoint has obviously set his heart upon building an enduring

monument of his own renown, linking his name with some achievement that, like those pyramids which defend nothing, shelter nothing, teach nothing, foster nothing, will immortalise in heaps of colossal barrenness a royal mummy and his faded empire. The vain man wants to do something that will be sacred from the hands of the would-be reformer, or the infallibility of the mighty worker will be left in doubt.

Why should posterity, out of sheer respect for us, abstain from trying to better our work? The grand key to the enigma of history lies in the future and not in the past, and every man is sent into the world to be the harbinger of an improved epoch rather than a servile devotee of his predecessors. Every fresh generation brings its springtides of hope and vitality to help on the common good of the race, and is not commissioned to furnish us with new contingents of minions and satellites. If in the enterprises to which we have devoted our lives there is any promise of good and any possibility of adding to the measure of that good, it will be the clear duty of our successors to make the enterprises we have inaugurated yet more serviceable to the after-times; We are thinking of our mean, miserable selves rather than of others, when we fret and fume and sulk because our work is not likely to last for ever in the exact form in which it leaves our hands. Let us not be so pertinacious and self-opinionated. It is not quite polite to our contemporaries, and it is equally bad manners to our successors. In some half-civilised countries if the chief of a tribe falls by mischance from his horse all his followers must mimic the accident, or it would seem as though they were better than he. That grotesque custom has its roots

in our common human nature, and we expect the after-generations to trip where we have tripped, and to copy the errors that may have found place in our works. That those into whose hands our schemes must shortly pass should try and amend them, whether they succeed or not, is well for the world, and not unprofitable discipline for us. It is a wholesome reminder of the fact that there are not two infallible popes in the world but only one, and that frailty and shortsightedness may enter into our highest work.

The temper which here shows itself, let us hope only as a passing phase in the character of the preacher king, is that of one drunk with pride and unlimited power, spoiled by the glare of unearned success, swayed by the primeval temptation rather than by the first promise, and eager to be as the gods; and a man of this temper is atheist or idolater whether he knows it or not. Let us not turn our holy task into arrogant Babel-building, for that implies a false view of ourselves and of human life. Let us be content to do our part alongside with others, not disdaining those whom we petulantly write down as fools, should such men ever come to have a brief dominion over our work. The wise men of the upgrowing generation are not infrequently fools in the judgment of the spent ranks which are moving down the hill into the sunset. The race has not touched such a climax of moral efflorescence that it must needs degenerate from this time forth. I am one of many toilers in the kingdom of God, and there is no reason why my plans and performances should be sacred from all after-interference and improvement. Others, through their growing skill, may cultivate

finer blooms to put into our gardens, trees of nobler stature and rarer grain to adorn our parks, herbs of more healing efficacy to plant in our fields, and they may succeed in substituting richer and more translucent stones for the crude and unwrought material with which we have reared temples and palaces.

II. This querulous utterance implied *an ungracious disdain of the men who were shortly to step into power.* The fact that the king grows sick at heart, fearing the worst rather than hoping for the best, shows that in his view all the signs of the times pointed to a coming reign of the fools. As a bare possibility he allows that through some happy turn of fortune his work may come under the control of the wise after he shall have passed from the stage of life and action; but the possibility is remote, and the auguries are inauspicious. He concludes that the stupid reactionaries will be likely to get a long and a disastrous innings. Perhaps a touch of envy warps his judgment; and one consumed by such a temper would be scarcely less unhappy even if the wise were to get control and authority over his work. A man's survey of those who are waiting in the background for either his money or power does not usually err on the side of charity. To think well of our heirs and legatees we need more grace than Solomon had. It is the common fate of the generation just growing into influence to be contemptuously judged, and no greater harm than that can be done to it.

Of all men in the world it ill became Solomon to be hard upon the fools. He had not always set an example of lofty wisdom in his own person, and the luxurious harems he had acclimatised upon Jewish soil were not suited to be schools of sublime philosophy

and breeding-places of stalwart virtue. And in a lukewarm and unspiritual state of society an evil prophecy of this sort tends to fulfil itself. The scoffing cynicism of one of our own recent writers who said that his fellow-countrymen numbered thirty millions, "mostly fools," has not helped to add a new adherent to the elect circle of the *illuminati*. Not to trust those by our side who expect one day to take up our work is just the way to demoralise and incapacitate them. The effect is the same as that produced by the suspicious head of a household who keeps every cheap trifle under lock and key. Such a policy trains to cunning as certainly as that of Fagin himself. Mistrust of posterity is perhaps a meaner and more wicked thing than mistrust of our immediate contemporaries, for posterity cannot speak for itself or lift up a protesting voice against unjust and wholesale condemnation. Those who are to follow us should surely have the benefit of the second half of the rule, "Of the dead and the absent nothing but good." To expect no great achievements from those who will by and by receive our work into their trust, and catch up power from our dying hands, is the most criminal of all blunders. It is a rare character indeed which can endure contempt and suspicion without deterioration under the process. We do our utmost to imperil our own work when we assume that no one will be fit to continue it after the sceptre has fallen from our lifeless grasp.

III. This unhappy mood implies *a gloomy view of the future of the human race.* The wise man lacked faith in his species and its unknown possibilities, lacked that faith which it was the specific purpose

of the promise made to his forefathers to produce. He did not expect schools and fellowships of upright and sagacious men would arise to carry out what was best in his plans. To his own complacent estimate it seemed that the race had touched the high-water mark of intelligence and sanctity in himself, and that now the inevitable decline must begin. How inferior in faith to Samuel and Elijah and Elisha, who founded and fostered schools for the nurture of the prophets, and who, in spite of the stern work they had to do, turned an undespairing outlook upon the future! Jesus and His apostles expected unbroken relays of sowers and reapers to co-operate with each other in carrying on the victorious work of the kingdom to the end of time. The Church could not fail although the gates of hell might send forth redhot torrents of rage and threatening death; and the lineage of godly and discerning workers would never be cut off root and branch, like the house of Eli. That was a noble idea, and we must not be frightened away from it when we see it travestied in the doctrine of apostolic succession. Of course the representatives of Jesus and His apostles can never die out; but the test by which we discover the true succession is ethical and religious and not mechanical. Our Lord knew far too well the high capabilities which were hidden away in redeemed humanity to assume that His work could prove abortive after He had left the earth. He made preparation for its maintenance to the end of time. Let us not lightly conclude that any work worth doing will be frittered away by the hordes of coming fools. The race has been improving, slowly it may be, and is going to improve to the end of time. Of course

there are dangers, and all men are not wise. The heirs of great trusts and splendid traditions not infrequently prove themselves unworthy, and when Solomon departs Rehoboam sometimes arrives ; but the trusts and traditions are safe in spite of the caprice and unfaithfulness of those who receive them. Solomon expected degeneracy, and the expectation accelerated its approach. In the exact proportion in which we are wise and pure and kindly ourselves we shall look for improvement in the race. Let us believe that the fool is at hand, and will soon vault into power, and that after us will be the deluge, and we shall help to make the nation dwarfish, stereotyped, retrogressive. If we think and act as though future workers would arise and worthily carry on our modest beginnings, unborn and ungrown generations will respond to our confidence and we shall not lack men to stand before the Lord in our room for ever. The man is both an atheist and a hater of his kind who asserts that the world is moving backwards into the abyss of barbarism and folly.

III. This distempered moan indicates *a deep and ominous lack of religious faith.* He who speaks in such a keynote has for the time being lost faith in the providential sovereignty of God. To assume that after-history is dominated by chance, and that all the odds are in favour of mischief-making imbeciles, is to stray into a condition of essential infidelity or something even worse. Is the Lord Jehovah, forsooth, a being akin to the Hindu monkey god, within the shadow of whose temple armies of apes are held sacred, and, knowing it, venture to unroof houses, pull up crops, steal from wayside stalls, and keep up a year-long loot and riot, no man having the temerity

to forbid them? Is God, forsooth, the patron of chartered and witless destroyers who swarm at will through the fair scenes of human life and toil? Has the God of millennial prophecy nothing to do with the future developments of society? and are to-morrow and the day after to be entirely fortuitous? I do not wonder that such forebodings should seize upon the soul of a man who shuts God out of his survey; but they mark a frightful degree of deterioration from the time when the wise young king saw the cloud of the Divine glory which rested upon the temple and offered his never-to-be-forgotten dedication prayer. The man without God, if he is a logician, can have little hope for either himself or his kind. Apart from the sovereign rule of the Divine faithfulness, we lack just guarantees for the permanence of morality, progress, civilisation, and I do not wonder at an agnostic shaking his head ruefully over the assumption that the human race is going to evolve into yet higher greatness and nobility. If our work makes for God's glory and the common good, the providence of the Supreme will be over it, and it will never be frittered away by the shallow incapables who will step into our heritage of influence. There is a touch of Manichæism in this soul-sick pessimism. It sees a mere Puck installed over the universe as the Almighty's equal, who must needs satisfy his soul with sportiveness, and cheer on the fools who make havoc with the achievements of the wise. All such vapourings show that there is a heathen or an infidel half in our personalities, sadly needing to be exorcised if we are to become sane, happy, and useful members of society. Faith in God is one with the gift of prophecy, and if this royal preacher had

always stirred up the gift that was in him, he must have felt how all that was best in his work was bound to persist through apparent reaction and decline, till at last the greater than Solomon should appear to gather up into His plans the best work of the past, and fulfil the fair and holy dreams of the world's ardent youth.

IV. This unhappy, corrosive temper may sometimes eat into our hearts, not because we formally repudiate the doctrines of God's providential sovereignty, but *because we are not living and working in high harmony with His counsels.* No wonder this royal preacher had little hope of God's guardianship over his achievements in after-years, if it had been made an article of his weekday catechism that the chief end of man was to glorify himself and to deck his person and garnish his palaces with the wealth and splendour of India, Arabia, Egypt, and the islands of the sea. It was not surprising he should begin to feel himself a misguided man if he had been making ivory, gold, rubies, peacocks, his chief quest and filling up his best days with dainty dreams of courts, picturesque attendants, and gorgeous harems as closely packed as cells in a honeycomb. In catering so lavishly for the lusts and luxuries of the flesh, this king was doing his own will and work rather than God's, and it may have been the appointed penalty of his ornate selfishness that fools should make havoc of his accomplished schemes just as soon as he had passed away. He speaks of parks, pleasure-gardens, fountains, artificial lakes, palace orchestras, fortune-making, personal enrichment, material aggression. It is true there was a point at which he became patriotic and sought his people's prosperity; but

that seems to have been his second thought rather than his first. And this policy of self-aggrandisement was identified with foreign marriages and heathen coalitions which had a demoralising effect upon the nation at large as well as upon his immediate successors, and which prepared the way for the schisms and tragic apostasies of the coming time. If we cherish no higher views of life, we cannot fairly count upon the good offices of Divine Providence in protecting our enterprise from the pranks of fools. What right has that man to look for the enduring blessing of God who chooses his tasks in selfishness and pride? Let our work be holy, unselfish, spiritual, and God will accept it as a sacrificial tribute to His own honour and preserve it from the violations of the unknown future; for the sons of light, seen by the seer of Patmos, who compass the altar in heaven, hover likewise in their strong ministries about every altar upon earth where lies the accepted oblation of unselfish toil.

That unseen Providence which watches and defends the welfare of mankind, receives into its gracious keeping all well-meant and honest work serving the common good, for that is a part of the great charge it has accepted. He who spends himself in what is highest is a labourer together with God; and God lives on when the confederate in service dies, and He will defend, enlarge, and consummate whatever has been sincerely done. If this be our distinction we need have no fear of the mischief which may be wrought by the witless blunderers and destructionists of the morrow. Unless we exercise ourselves upon a sufficiently high plane of enterprise this temper will inevitably harass, perplex, and paralyse us; it will

prove the Nemesis of every man who lives for himself and for shortsighted materialistic ends.

An escape from this melancholy frame of mind may always be found in humility and faith. The Lord Jesus lived and died in sure and certain hope, although He had forecasts of false prophets and false Messiahs who would strive to annul His work, and of dark and bloody tides of persecution which were destined to engulf again and again the Church He founded. But He was sure of coming victory and of a dominion which should outlast all time. St. Paul never assumed that his work would be marred and its benefits effaced from the world after his departure. He spoke of grievous wolves making havoc of the flocks he had shepherded. He had forecasts of pestilent heresies involved again and again in mortal struggle with the faith. In the near as well as in the distant future he saw mysterious apostasies and pitiful fallings-away. And yet he felt that what had been best in his life of toil could not be destroyed. The fool may pull to pieces "the wood, the hay, and the stubble," but he cannot spoil or disintegrate the work done in "gold and silver and precious stones." Yea, the royal preacher himself felt, in his better moods, that "whatsoever God doeth shall be for ever," and the way was open to him to make his work better and more enduring by becoming a more perfect servant of the Divine will.

XII

RECOVERED YOUTHFULNESS

"Who satisfieth thy mouth with good things, so that thy youth is renewed like the eagle's."—PSA. ciii. 5.

THE allusion in these words is probably to the yearly moulting of the eagle. By some it has been thought the Psalmist had in mind an ancient fiction which declared that the eagle, having scathed itself by soaring into the focus of the sun's splendour, plunged into the depths of the sea, where its life was renewed; a process which was repeated at intervals for a hundred years. If that unscientific fancy was in the Psalmist's thought it would not invalidate the truth set forth in the similitude any more than the preacher's message to-day would be untrustworthy if illustrated by a fable from Æsop or a story from Hans Andersen. The great lesson is that those whom God forgives, crowns with favour, and feeds with spiritual bounties, possess the secret of perpetual youth. The life that God nurtures will always rejuvenate itself and escape the weariness and humiliation of age.

A famous Roman once penned a delightful treatise intended to reconcile himself and the friend to whom it was dedicated, to the approach of old age. Much in his cheerful philosophy is worthy of the study of

Christian people, though some things are superfluous ; for the Bible shows to us a more excellent way. The humiliations and bitter distresses of old age need never come to us if an inward process of spiritual repair is effected to compensate the disabilities of outward decay. The Oriental idea of rebirth is not lacking in fine suggestiveness, for it seems to speak of the inexhaustible vitality and patient hopefulness of nature. But if there be an irrecoverable eclipse of consciousness before the dawn of a new life can come, and each successive birth is heralded by pain and followed by turmoil. the attractiveness of the offer is inferior by far to the immortality promised to us in the gospel. After our birth into the kingdom of God there need be no further decline or decay, but a renewal into perpetual youthfulness both here and hereafter. That is the hope set before us. To be ever receiving back from a sin-forgiving God life in the freshness of its springtide, charged with new hope, new wonder, new enthusiasm, new trust tender and implicit as nestles in the heart of a child, is a boon higher than that offered to us by the most fascinating speculations of the Gentile world.

Youthfulness contains within itself so many of the best qualities of life that men and women are sometimes found clinging to the form when the power has passed away. They shrink with unconcealed aversion from the outward intimations of approaching age. The laws of health are studied and the first signs of senility watched against as jealously as the Channel squadron would watch the approach of an invading power to our shores. These cultivators of youthfulness put a value upon fresh air second only to that of their worldly possessions. They are fastidious about their

food because they wish to continue long in the heyday of their physical power and perfection. Perhaps they affect athletics until they are well on in years, and even when joints are stiff, muscles rigid, and limbs thinning off, they buy the cricket and football editions of the evening papers. And they try to carry the trick a step further and keep the brain young. The taste for the magazine and the last novel, rather than for more solid literature, is due in part to the fact that they want to know the last thing out, and to march in pace with the progress of the world. At any cost they must keep themselves mentally young, and garnish the brain with the freshest novelties, just as the person past middle life sometimes tries to dress like a girl. That is specious and self-deceiving, and the deepest secret is missed. There is, however, an inward life upon which it is far more needful to keep the bloom of unfading youth, and to do that is perfectly practicable. Unless we know the Psalmist's secret old age will fasten upon our religion, and that will be a calamity indeed. True religion is always fresh and glowing as the day-dawn, and if it have lost its youthfulness, decay and oblivion are inevitably before it. Moral weariness and decrepitude in the soul are marks left by the devil's branding-iron, whilst moral freshness and love and strength are the sure signs of God's health-giving favour. The association of ideas in the context implies that renewal into perpetual youth is the fruit of that Divine mercy which forgives sin, heals disease, redeems from destruction, and crowns with lovingkindness as with a royal diadem.

Leaving on one side for a moment the more spiritual application of these words, we find this pro-

cess of *waste and repair going on in connection with the common experiences of life.* Great troubles come to men in sad and obstinate succession, so that they break down utterly ; hope exhausts itself, and they are unable to expect anything besides new troubles or the stated recurrence of the old. The hair turns grey, the step halts, and in a few short days they seem to be staggering beneath burdens like those of Atlas. A long epoch of commercial depression puts premature wrinkles upon the brow and quenches the lustre of the eye. Fell disease holds them in its clutch for a time, strength ebbs, and the grasshopper is a burden, as to the tottering patriarch. They lose all hold of life, and look as if on the point of being finally wrenched away from its interests and occupations. And then brighter days come round. The cloud breaks and the tension is overpast. They learn wisdom, and put less strain upon themselves. New interests spring up in life, and a capacity for new friendships dawns within them. The sickness disappears and an epoch full of promise opens in their history. They are like the man who goes down into the troubled pool a wreck and comes back with the bloom of a child upon his face. Youth has renewed itself. This is like what takes place in religious history, and also a faint analogy of the methods by which it is brought to pass. Life recovers its freshness through the removal of disease, the making light of burdens that were bowing the strong frame, the healing of feuds that were cankering the soul, the putting of a new environment of kindness about the daily footsteps. And the inner temper of youthfulness comes back to us as God shows us new depths in His mercy, new resources in His bounty, new pardons

in His exhaustless grace, and new privileges of festal communion in His presence. It is a fruit of the ever-repeated forgiveness conveyed to the opening and receptive heart. Our life will rejuvenate itself into hope and praise, strength and glad astonishment, when we enter into the Psalmist's view and prove that an atmosphere of Divine favour and kindness enwraps us on every side.

Youth is *a symbol of the flowing tide of life*, and in the natural order of things, age stands for its ebb. Age does outgrow not a few of the temptations which lie upon the threshold of manhood, but perils of another order arise through its diminished vitality. Unless our youth is daily renewed we shall make but a poor show when the testing-times come upon us. Two persons are walking side by side across some lonely moor in wind and storm and drenching rain. The one is in the full glory of his opening life. His step is quick, his pulse high, the colour mantles in his cheek, the blood is warm in every square inch of his flesh, and each nerve thrills with healthy excitement and delight. The storm is like a baptism into richer and more wholesome life. The other is in feeble old age, and the torrents of rain cling to his limbs like a clammy winding-sheet. Every step is a mortal struggle, the pulse is low, the form bowed, and the roar of the storm is his death-sentence. The one is full of vigour, invincible impulse, overflowing vitality; the other is decadent, tottering, grave-gripped, because of the extreme feebleness brought by the weight of years. And if God renew our youth like the eagle's we shall face without a single hurt the storms and conflicts and testing-times of our earthly pilgrimage. Religious life never ought to be old.

He whom God thus revives and inspires is able to forget his sorrows and to disburden himself of cares. Disappointments do not cast down or destroy, but leave the powers as elastic as ever. Wrongs do not rankle with wasting pain. A fresh start is made every day as though there had been no experience whatever of the hardness, the wickedness, the mortifications of the world. The man whose youth is thus renewed like the eagle's has a soul filled with the power of blessing others, as the springs among the hills are filled by the summer rains.

Many experiences remind us that *the attritions in our daily lot tend to wear out religious life* itself, and if we neglect the superhuman sources of repair it must wane and perish, as surely as an overpressed physical life. We often hold tenaciously to the traditions of our faith when we cannot hide from ourselves the fact that our very heart's blood is becoming turgid and frosty and sluggish. The buoyancy of our first experience is gone, and work means drain and strain and weariness. Our life has dragged on from stage to stage without this daily rejuvenation, and we have had so little faith that we have been drawing for the power of service and ministry upon ourselves rather than upon the immortal God. The spirit of the world, which looks everywhere with the suspicious eye, and affirms that the only law observed by the individual and the race is the law of selfishness, has taken possession of us, and every early enthusiasm is black with frostbite. We have been over-sanguine, and resent the frequent failure or the qualified success of the past. The claim we established upon popular gratitude has not always been recognised, and so we bring our miserable misanthropies

into God's work of redeeming love and make its sublime enterprises a serfdom. Those early dreams were a mixture of mocking hollowness and uninstructed piety, and we are wiser than once, if not so effusive. It sometimes looks as though Providence, with its endless riddles, had been trifling with our faith in God. Men at least have betrayed us. The sense of overflowing pleasure we had in religion a few decades ago is fled. As we survey the prospect around us we are fettered and burdened with a mixed history and experience, and put our hands languidly to the duty that will not be declined. We no longer view the world and the work allotted to us in the benign light of daydawn and whilst the dew is still wet upon the grass. It is sultry, dust-choked, weary noonday with us, and the hope, faith, and freshness of our first consecration are gone. Perhaps it is better that we should stand aside and make way for the young, for we are stale, hypercritical, fertile in doubts and misgivings, prone to unhappy forecasts; and the work of the hour can only be done by those whose hearts are warm and eager. But surely that need not be. Religion brings the promise of rejuvenation to the mind, and the temper that has mastered us indicates that we are in closer intimacy with the world than with the God who renews the youth of His servants like the eagle's.

Those familiar with the famines of the Eastern world tell us that perhaps the most harrowing thing in such dire calamities is the stamp of age put for a time upon the comely features of infancy and youth. On the brows of babes the skin is wrinkled as though they had passed through long decades of labour and sorrow; while boys and girls who, if screened from

care and trouble, would have represented the perfection of the human form, might well stand for models of old Father Time with his forbidding scythe. These marks of an unseasonable senility left by the ruthless ravage of dearth are scarcely less sad than the effacing touch of death itself. We sometimes, alas! see sights in our midst not entirely dissimilar from this pathetic incident of famine scenes. The child who has known the peace and the inspiration of a child's simple religion, before emerging from his teens becomes precociously and diabolically wise, and leaves behind him the fervour, the soaring hopefulness, the quick love and the wonder which become his years. Some ill-advised friend, eager to establish a reputation for cleverness by the cheap methods of cynicism, has taught him to look upon the world with suspicion and upon the Church with a preternatural glance of discerning censorship. Before reaching the prime of his youth he has grown flippant and sceptical both about men and the substance of religion itself. He has fed himself on the chaff of crude and reckless dubitations. His soul is glutted with the devil's innutritious literature of envy, scorn, pessimism. The beauty, the promise, the ardour of youth are lost, and can never be recovered till there is a complete turning round. He is a wrinkled babe of the famine scourge, a spent, unhopeful, impotent octogenarian doubled up with a miserable soul stoop, scarcely out of his teens. Till such an one consents to be fed by those satisfying bounties of God of which the Psalmist speaks, he will never recover the strength, the charm, the brightness of youth. Just as the heat of the tropics forces on a precocity which is the omen of early decay, and a wretched, dragging old age

begins at thirty, so the hot, feverish atmosphere into which a child is sometimes brought, the life of excitement into which he passes years too soon, the educational forcing-house in which he is put to unfold, accelerate the stage at which mind and character begin to shrink rather than expand, and bring near the curse of a premature age. In this, perhaps more than in any previous epoch, we need to learn the secret of perpetual youthfulness and open our souls to those bounties made ready by God's hand which renew the youth like an eagle's.

The Apostle Paul is pre-eminent for his unfailing youthfulness of character; no tribulation could quench the fire of his enthusiasm or destroy the buoyancy of his spirit. He speaks of himself as "Paul the aged," but neither in his mental nor spiritual life is there the slightest sign of abating vigour or failing vitality. He has been gashed, bruised, put in chains, scarred with repeated scourgings, and has carried upon his heart for a generation the care of the Churches; but his temper is lightsome, his thought alert, his pulse high with virgin hopefulness, and his veins full of the same warmth as when in those far-off days at Damascus, he preached the gospel, or waited for God's further teaching in the deserts of Arabia. A tree of tenacious hardihood called the tree of life grows in the Central American forests. If the leaf be cut, new buds will at once form themselves on the shorn, bleeding edge thereof, and its tenacious vitality and productiveness will be asserted in face of the fiercest injury. As we read the catalogue of the ills that failed to daunt the spirit of the apostle we feel he must surely have eaten of the fruit of that tree. "Pressed on every side yet not straitened;

perplexed yet not unto despair; pursued yet not forsaken; smitten down yet not destroyed; always bearing about in the body the dying of Jesus, that the life also of Jesus may be manifested in our body." And the Giver of life repeats His wonder to those who wait in His presence. If our youth is renewed, the sorrow that has cut us to the heart will not prove itself a death-wound nor hinder our after-fruitfulness. True religion must be young, for it is an expanded childhood.

The temper of *old age sometimes steals upon men in their corporate life*, and influence wanes till final eclipse is reached. The secular historian tells us that the biological law of upgrowth followed by decay is likewise the law of peoples and nations and empires. Races are cradled in obscure corners of the earth, grow up into lusty manhood, by force of arms or by industrial skill assert their ascendency over their neighbours, reach their zenith, begin to decline, and are at last buried beneath the incubus of their own past. We are pointed to the old-world empires of Assyria, Babylon, Egypt, Persia as illustrations, and the great empires of the East are following in the same mournful pathway to insignificance and ultimate oblivion. To-day the latter are little better than paralytics wheeled about in bath-chairs by the various Powers of Europe, who compete with each other for the honour. And it is assumed that sooner or later the turn will come to all the dominant States of our own Continent. Some of them are already spent forces. The ruling nations of to-morrow will cover the valleys of the Mississippi and the Saskatchewan rivers, and find their rallying-places in the cities of the Pacific coast. We have already passed the top of the hill, and are following slowly to the long

bourne of the empires and civilisations whose mummies archeologists unearth and sort out into classes for our instruction. That may be the law of a world that repudiates God and His life-giving ministries, but there is a higher law which is able to hold it in check. It is the decay of faith which disintegrates and topples down dominant nations and conquering empires. Even the idolatries of Rome contributed less to its downfall than its scepticisms. The great hoary nations of the East, whose vitality has not altogether ceased, are held together by the imperfect religions they nurture rather than by their negations and enlightened agnosticisms. No nation can survive its rejection of God, and the abandonment of a false god is perilous, unless the false be replaced by the true. The frictions of toil, the fever of overwrought civilisations, the burdens and responsibilities of empire will wear a nation down into weakness, decrepitude, weariness, and despair unless its life be continually revived at the everlasting springs. The race that remembers to wait upon God will renew its youth, and escape the doom of decadence and extinction which overtakes haughty, godless empires and their licentious rulers.

The ecclesiastical historian has sometimes as sad a tale to tell of *the decline and fall of Churches* as the secular historian of worldly empires. Religious movements tend after a time to lose their fervour and the motive forces of their youth. Their very successes often become their temptation and their doom. Those engaged in carrying on these movements begin to feel that they have grave and intricate interests to guard, and that they must act on the defensive rather than push into wider fields their campaigns of daring

and holy altruism. Decadence is not far off when the watchword is concentrate rather than extend. Sometimes financial cares weight these movements, and their leaders come to think that the first duty resting upon them is to steer these interests with superb discretion. Personal burdens would, perhaps, be cast upon God, but it is magnanimous and heroic to bear to the point and strain of breaking, the burdens of the religious organisations with which we are identified. And so at last the enterprise of youth is replaced by the caution of age, and the Churches themselves become the incarnations of a frosty wisdom and a calculating prudence more or less ignoble. Name, standing, prestige have been acquired, and they must be carefully guarded. Power of adaptation is lost. The charm of the first graces is gone, and the Church which should be Christ's fair and gladsome bride, full of life, hope, and untiring ministration, becomes jaded, soulless, wise with the lore that comes from a long experience of disappointment—a wrinkled and miserable Mephistopheles. Movements manifestly providential at the outset begin to flag and show signs of reaction. Religious systems, embodying in their standards pure truth and through which God's Spirit once wrought effectually, tend to crumble and dissolve. Such may be the law of common history and the order of a world ruled by the powers of darkness, but it is not the law and order of those religions which rise at the throne of the eternal. Before that stage is reached fellowship with God has been broken off. It is hopeless to try and detain within ourselves and the Churches to which we belong the Spring, with its charm and freshness and superhuman lustres, for

the Spring is ephemeral. But we must detain it, and if we suffer it to go it is our fault and our just loss. Our Churches need new leaders, new blood, new enthusiasms, new faiths, new enterprises, new accessions. True; but would it not be better to say that we ourselves need these things; and all these needs can be supplied through the richness of life in Christ Jesus? Renewed vitality is always possible to the men and the Churches who keep in intimate fellowship with the God whose strength is ever fresh.

It has been said that the Old Testament contains few, if any, traces of a belief in personal immortality. It is quite possible to exaggerate the significance of that gap in the primitive revelations, for the doctrine that the soul survives the death of the body is in some form or other a universal truth, and to assert the doctrine or to present arguments in its support, may not have seemed necessary to the inspired writers. The sense of immortality made itself felt in many ways, and this experience of renewal into continuous youthfulness experienced by the devout Jew, was replete with hope; indeed the doctrine of immortality would have been a mutilated benediction without it. To rejuvenate from time to time the faculties of life by the processes of a mystic creation, and to snatch the being again and again from the death to which it was descending, is to give the best possible earnest of immortality and eternal life. To put the fresh soul of youth into one just about to pass into an unconsciousness from which there can be no awaking, would be to vex and to distress with exquisite cruelty, and to make death as bitter for those who have lived out the full span of their days as for those who

are ruthlessly cut off whilst standing only upon the threshold of life. If death were to end all, the Jew must have felt that to kindle the force and hope of youth in one so condemned would have been worthy of a tormenting demon rather than of a gracious and pitiful God.

Recovered youthfulness is in itself *meetness for immortality*. Our doctrine of an endless being would be repulsive apart from that rejuvenation of the powers which makes ready for the enjoyment of it. The sense of jadedness may weigh upon our anticipations of heaven. A lady who had varied the excitements of fashionable life by six months of feverish, high-speed travel through the Eastern world said, "I am too tired for heaven; I want to be wrapped up in lavender and laid on a shelf for a thousand years." For the appreciation of this world as well as that which is beyond it, we need a replenished inward life. In nine cases out of ten when Alexander weeps it is not that he has no more worlds to conquer, but because he has so worn himself out that he cannot possess the world which lies at his feet. We have come to speak of the activities of heaven as various, including widely differentiated ministries as well as worship; and rightly so, for a monotonous immortality would be a curse grievous to bear. But the cure for monotony often lies within. The ever-lengthening duration of life apart from its replenishment with new faculties and new enthusiasms would be intolerable. There must be that constant renewal of the youth of which devout worshippers of God in every period of the world's history have had experience. And the writer of the Apocalypse, in describing his visions, is mindful of this need. Life blooms with a vernal freshness

that never stales. The river that flows through the celestial city and the fountains to which the Shepherd King leads His redeemed flock are symbols of vitality and perpetual renewal. It is always springtide, for the trees yield their fruit every month. The sere and yellow leaf is unknown, for new buds burst into view before the first sign of decay in the old has appeared. Eternity will consist in the successive unfoldings of countless promises, and our growth will be towards the eagerness and rapture of youth, and not towards the satiety of age. We need not be appalled at the thought of spending an endless existence in God's presence, if in the Divine fountain of life, we receive renewed baptisms into virginal freshness and vigour. With hearts of unquenched ardour and unwearied purpose we shall ever be starting on pilgrimages of untrodden thought, with breasts full of new-born wonder and reverence we shall ever be setting our faces towards new shrines of worship, with fresh hopes kindling in our veins we shall ever be moving to unvisited fields of holy enterprise and service. The nature whose youth is here renewed like the eagle's, will be invigorated there for ever-ascending flights. The progress to which we are beckoned is towards an ideal of perpetual youth.

In Jesus Christ, who, in the full flower of His manhood, offered His life as a sacrifice for sin, God has given to the world the type of consummate excellence, and that excellence would have been vitiated by the least sign of decadence. That fair, unblemished personality was offered to God before its youthful glory had gone. The perfect bloom was not dashed, overblown, cankered, rifled of its fragrance and of its morning dew. The melancholy process of exhaustion

had not yet begun. And it is that which is set forth before the world as the pattern of what is highest and noblest in humanity. It was this life, with the sweetness and lustre of youth upon it, that was taken to the right hand of God and glorified as the standard to which all redeemed life shall be conformed. In spite of the strange burdens pressing upon His soul, of cups of bitterness and baptisms of fiery pain unexampled in the chronicles of human woe, no grey hair silvered those locks, no infirmity bowed that form of perfect grace, no power or faculty of the being was spent or beginning to fail. He is the symbol of the eternal youth of God, in whose presence we may all recover what was best and fairest in life's springtime. As the cross came into view the holy ardour, the enthusiasm of love, the mighty hope marking His early manhood did not depart. There was no symptom, however faint, of spiritual weariness or relaxed anticipation. When the last gruesome act opened He had wider and more richly coloured visions than ever. The grace, the tenderness, the sacred vehemence, the large all-confiding love of His youth, He never lost, for they had been daily renewed to Him by the meat of which the world knew not; and through the progress of the ages He will never lose these things. And this fact must rule our service as well as encourage our hope. It was young life that God always claimed in the sacrifices of the temple, and our consecration to the Divine will, cannot be acceptable if we lack the spirit of youthfulness. Let us live in the fellowship of Jesus Christ, and be baptized with His Spirit, and we shall then be ever renewing our life. "Your young men shall see visions and your old men shall dream

dreams." The dreams of old men who receive the Spirit are as rich, as far-ranging, as many-hued as the visions of the young men. Cherishing this Spirit, however deep our wounds and fierce and wasting our conflicts, we shall not fail in warmth and hope and fresh springing force. God's millennium is a perpetual springtide, and not an Indian summer—burning splendour that is a prelude to decay. The sense of new life will always be vibrating in our fibres and hovering about our pathway. Let us be in close contact with God, sitting daily at His banquet. All we need His hand has made ready for us, and we are free to take it. If we are His guests and He is ours, the best gifts and the noblest possessions of youth will never pass away. "He satisfieth thy mouth with good things so that thy youth is renewed like the eagle's."

XIII

CHRIST'S ANTIDOTE TO PESSIMISM

"Ask and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full."—JOHN xvi. 24.

AS Jesus stands upon the threshold of His terrible separation from the disciples, He speaks of a double joy that should by and by come back to His bereaved followers. The first joy was that which should be awakened by His resurrection from the dead and brief sojourn in their midst. Prayed for or not, that was bound to come. The most discerning of Christ's friends had no specific expectation of an early resurrection, nor could they possibly have besought the boon of that first Easter joy. It stole upon them unasked, like the gladness that gathers in mens' veins with the inevitable progress of the spring. When the Master came back from the grave His eye lustrous with the old kindness and His lips framing the old benedictions, the joy was such that the least spiritual could more or less participate in it.

But a joy of that nature could not fill up the measure of those God-begotten capacities that had been infixed within them. The highest and most abiding kind of joy, associated as it is with the

ministry of the promised Comforter in the Church, can only come in response to importunate individual asking. There is a joy that flows through the channel of the healthy senses, and there is a subtler joy that conveys itself into human life through the channels of faith alone. There is a joy that inheres in well-contented natural affections, and there is a rarer joy, exhaled like fragrance, from the spiritual affections which have opened to receive God in all the mystery of His blessedness. There is a joy that crowns man's natural life when it is deftly attuned to his social surroundings and to that bit of the visible universe which invests and overspreads him, and there is a surpassing joy which seals and consummates man's harmonious relation to the unseen and the Divine. And this more perfect joy of which Christ here speaks can only diffuse its priceless virtues through our souls in answer to prayer. No gleam of a returning Saviour's face will bring that to us unless we first solicit it with passionate and believing supplication.

The religion that is not cheerful, buoyant, rejoicing, fails to satisfy the ideal of Jesus Himself as He described it in His discourses, and especially in the upper room. Many of His misguided followers imagine they grow like Him by asceticism, and the number has tended to increase within recent years. A gloom has overspread the modern Churches which makes the genius of their piety as alien to the spirit of Jesus as the austerities of Trappist monks and flagellationists. The religious cheerfulness and jubilation of our forefathers is lost. The Puritan was not so dismal by half as many a present-day Churchman, at least when he is within church walls.

The hymns in greatest favour with cultivated congregations are of a sad and morbid strain. Minor tunes are preferred in our service of praise. To hear lusty, heart-stirring music, such as would have pleased David when he danced before the ark, one must needs go to a mission-room filled with poor people who have little or no comfort in their lives beyond that which they draw from their religion. And the sobbing pathos of our Church music often seems to increase with the wealth and gaiety of the congregation. Some of us may be fairly good disciples of the hermit preacher of the wilderness, but we have not half enough serenity and joyfulness to bring us into appreciable resemblance to Jesus Christ or approach to His ideals.

Some little time ago an earthquake was felt in Southern Europe, and a small mountain lake disappeared from view. The sweet, pure waters were supposed to have rushed through the rents and flaws left in the track of the disturbance and to have passed into the subterranean hollows and caverns of the earth. And in almost every sphere of life we have had our upheavals and convulsions and panics, and it often seems as though the brightness and affluence of religious life had irrecoverably emptied itself through the rents left in the wake of these changes. The age is distinctively sad, heart-weary, forlorn. The pulse of even the Churches is not high and bounding. Christ's followers have been made to share the grim, sultry, overclouded, despairing temper of the world. Many influences are at work which tend to make us susceptible to the persistent depressions that operate on the popular temper around us.

What are the causes of this sadness? Can the faults and the fissures which have wrought such havoc be filled up and the vanished joy of discipleship be regained once more?

Our position has many points of correspondence with that of the sad-hearted disciples. The disciples had been subject to a painful tension of soul for some months past, and they had suffered a threefold disenchantment. They had lost their delight in common life; they were in doubt about Jesus Christ Himself; and the sense they had of their own vocation seemed to have failed, for their early dreams had been shattered.

As the disciples gathered for their sad passover they were feeling *the double strain of a fevered past and an impenetrable future.* They had been passing through experiences that tended to make their sensibilities morbidly acute, and it was under such conditions that they listened into the far midnight to the farewell words of their Master. It is difficult for us to realise the tension, scarcely eased for a single hour, that had been upon them since leaving Galilee some few months ago. Their brains had been overwrought by daily religious excitement, alternating with peril and antagonism. They had endured strange hardships and encountered an inhospitality strange to the traditions of their country. Opposition had confronted them of which they had known comparatively little during their association with Jesus in the more popular period of His ministry. Not once or twice only had their lives been threatened. They must have felt like some marked-down statesman or ruler who stands in daily fear of assassination. Great issues were supposed to be near at hand.

Unless perhaps for a few days in the city of Ephraim on the edge of the wilderness, they had enjoyed little or no opportunity for repose, quiet reflection, calmly regulated life. And now they find themselves listening through the night-watches to words which are a forecast of treachery, doom, and stormy death.

A tension not quite so tragic in its outward form but scarcely less severe, is felt by not a few of our fellow-men. Many and trying are the hours during which they are occupied in a more or less hostile world. They have to be abnormally awake during the day, and are never quite asleep for the short space they call night. There are risks of business which are just as much matters of life and death to them as the temper of the Judean mob to the disciples during their last wanderings with their Prophet Friend. Secular and sacred questions alike strain the attention. Intense expectation is followed by frequent disappointment. The cry, Lo here! and Lo there! still brings its pain and its distracting illusions. Now the Messiah is a new discoverer; now a politician of inspired originality; now a man just about to arrive who will give a new turn to our civilisation. And the night broken by these empty cries only deepens into sackcloth. It is a fact of mysterious and pathetic significance that the tendency to suicide grows in step with the march of civilisation. Impulsive and over-anxious school children now and again succumb to the temptation that comes with this relentless strain. And the stifling sadness seems sometimes to settle upon the Church life of our own and other lands, for true disciples still are often woefully overwrought in brain and nerve.

The twelve had passed through a threefold dis-

enchantment, the first stage of which was that *they could no longer find contentment in the common life of men.* The world had shrivelled, and they were no longer drawn to it. This would have mattered little if they had been in intelligent accord with Jesus Christ and His plans, but like some of us who have lost our birthright of joy, they were poised in an intermediate fashion between faith and worldliness. There was a fevered and nervous oscillation between God and the things of the senses, and perhaps there is no torture like that of being gripped on both sides by two divergent types of scepticism. These men had broken with the world, and the breach was final. They could not very well take up the thread of their life again at the point where they had dropped it three years before. For their old careers they were hopelessly disqualified by the new views that had taken possession of their being. After the instructions they had received from this most persuasive of teachers, they could no longer be satisfied to fish and collect tolls and buy and sell and make merry with their Galilean comrades. The trees had lost the golden sunlight that once glanced through their branches, and the mountains the fleet shades that once played upon their forms, and the comely lake its silvers, its purples and its azures, and the social life of Capernaum and Bethsaida its piquancy and its blithesomeness. Not only had they left their early grooves of occupation, but they had lost sympathy with the interests which once engrossed them.

At the same time their dedication to Christ had not issued in all that they had anticipated. They were tempted to think half regretfully of their sacrifices, and

yet have no wish to be restored to their old positions. Their Teacher had disappointed them, perhaps through no fault on His part, for it was His destiny. They retained their faith in His integrity, and still felt the unutterable spell of His friendship. He had not consciously misled them they were sure. But they had lost faith in His office and half-whispered claim to be Divine. Like some log cast between two eddies that races aimlessly through the same whirl of waters hour after hour, the disciples were at the mercy of the two currents of scepticism that swept them round and round in distracting circles. They could no longer lean upon the world, for they had been penetrated by a new and profound distrust of it. And they could scarcely lean upon the Messianic power of Jesus Christ, for that seemed to have been brought into serious question, and the dilemma would become yet more terrible in the course of a few short hours. Under these painful straits the last gleam of natural and spiritual joy had all but disappeared from their lives.

And at the present hour disciples of Jesus often find themselves in a position that presents many points of analogy to that of the twelve. They hover between two stubborn, soul-tormenting distractions. They cannot very well turn back to the world, for they have little or no faith in its resources, and are not at all drawn to its hollow and specious delights. The Greeks could revel in a life conceived upon the mere plane of nature. Their climate invited it, and their defective ethical education made it possible. Races that have been indoctrinated for centuries with the genius of the Bible are spoiled for a sunny, lightsome, uncalculating worldliness. An orphan babe

may be comforted by a toy, but the great bleeding heart of a David mourning the untimely death of one who had loved him with a love passing the love of women, would be exasperated by the solace of frivolity. If Jesus Christ has for ever gone from us, if He is proving to be only a fair and holy dream, if the doctrine of the Divine Fatherhood is nothing better than poetry, sentiment, imagination, we cannot be comforted in our bereavement by the cheap tinsel toys that are offered us in Vanity Fair. We have thought large things, our dreams have been big with transcendent aspirations, and we are no longer capable of those purely natural joys which may possibly appease for a time the needs and solicitations of pagan races. The old Greek gladness in feasts and blue sky, fine art and physical beauty, it is impossible to restore to us. We have reached a maturity at which the world can no longer satisfy us. We should feel just the same discontent if we were Alexanders and Napoleons, Rothschilds and Rockefellers. Some of our modern pessimisms arise from the fact that we are nauseated with toys, and at present nothing is forthcoming to take their place.

And besides all this we have a deepening sense of the world's instability. The Psalmist said of some of the gay and prosperous people of his day, "Their inward thought is that their houses shall continue for ever. They call their lands after their own names." We are too wise to cherish such thoughts now. The people who prepare cut flowers for the market sometimes put a drop of gum mastic at the base of the petals. By that little device the blooms are kept from falling for a few hours longer than they would

otherwise hold together. And so ancient kings and lawgivers applied their craft, and tried to preserve the glory and splendour of wealth for unbroken centuries. Caste laws were devised to narrow the range of marriage and keep property from distribution after it had once been gathered together. Sometimes the drop of gum was a law of entail enacted to keep the inheritance within one particular family, or a law of primogeniture that put the bulk of the family property into the hands of the oldest male descendant. Sometimes the drop of gum was a protective tariff or a tax upon exports that might conceivably go to enrich surrounding nations. Guilds set themselves to prohibit domestic competition, and statesmen tried to stamp out international competition. Or Nature herself became the arch-protectionist, and by frowning seas, snow-swept tablelands and formidable mountain ranges shut off a great race from all commerce with surrounding races. There are parts of the world where for a dozen centuries the values of land and produce and merchandise have been unchanged. Under such circumstances worldliness does not seem the infatuation it is with us. Sometimes the drop of gum was rigid conservatism of method. The inventive faculty was in a state of suspended animation, and for generations no change came to the industries of the race. There are languages in which no equivalent can be found for our word "fashion," and the cut of a garment only changes with a change of dynasty. Merchants and manufacturers know what demands have to be reckoned with for fifty years together, and, unless under the pressure of famine, prices scarcely vary. But with us in our day, wealth is like the cut flower without the trickle of gum to

prolong its bloom. The world was never quite immutable in its course, for Nature gave it a rude shock now and again, but its instability has become singularly obvious within recent times. So sensitive is our commercial life that half a dozen European rulers by a word or two any day in the year could add to or take from our incomes.

And in these times men have to pay a greatly enhanced price if they are to secure for their own use and enjoyment the little bit of the world upon which they have set their hearts. For a beggarly pittance they must needs make themselves into cadaverous martyrs. The prizes are few and scarcely worth the winning. The skeleton ascetics of modern industrialism haunt our daily pathway. The pains of a Stylites were nothing to those of a tram-driver, a clerk on a stool in an ill-ventilated city office, or a shop assistant where early closing is not the rule; and all that not for a coronet, but for a crust of bread and the shelter of an insanitary tenement. Splendid chances become less frequent every year. Perhaps worldly success always was a lottery, though every twentieth man might count on drawing a prize, but in the congested centres of population the man who now attains is one in a hundred.

If the Church is losing faith in the incontestable reality of the gospel, the world can do very little by the parade of its own fair hope and promise to fill up the tragic gap. If Christianity is a myth, life as it shapes itself in these nineteenth-century moulds is a more heartless pretence still. The new wisdom we have attained has spoiled us for settling down into the course of this world. When a Mongol seems to be sickening for death his friends do all they can to

allure back his departing soul ; they remind him how well they have treated him in the past ; they dress him in his best clothes, and drench or sprinkle him with rare perfumes ; they bring out his trinkets and spread them before his eyes ; they even call in a Buddhist bonze to recite the various horrors of Purgatory in his presence, so that his soul may be induced to stay in the flesh. And the world tries to cure our malady of heart and to win us back to its scenes of happiness after some such fashion as that. Look at the glitter and bravery and good fellowship offered you here, and be content. And if that is not enough it sets its worldly-wisemen to frighten us out of our little bit of piety by telling us what a gloomy and purgatorial affair a religious life is. But the heart-sickness persists. It would be the height of infatuation to return to the melancholy illusions of the past. The sadness of the world is a sign of its growing penetration. Material well-being cannot effectually satisfy us. The lighter literature of the day is weird with the writhings and the wails of lost souls. Writers who sing the praises of lust, classical nakedness, gilded pruriency, land themselves at last behind the iron bars of a despondency from which there is no escape. And the sadness of the world infects the Church. Like the disciples, we are passing through a heartbreaking disenchantment, and if no new light comes to us by way of our religion, the grave will be our only haven of rest.

But the process of disenchantment through which the disciples were passing involved for the moment that most sacred and vital of all interests, *their religious faith.* Under the new stress that had come upon them the hopes they had been led to cherish

were on the wane. Some of them at least were in danger of finding common meeting ground with the hostile sections of Jewish society around them, and inferring that if Christ could not make Himself the instrument of their political aims, and give effect to their ideas of nationality His mission, in spite of its marvellous accompaniments, would prove itself useless. They were kept from this by their personal friendship to Jesus and by the underlying conviction they had that the elementary faith of their forefathers could no longer satisfy them. Jesus had led them to see its limitations, and perhaps they needed no further evidence upon that question than the moral stagnation of priests and Scribes and the great masses of the people. They had been fascinated by Christ's interpretation of Divine things, and had felt the charm of the Divine Fatherhood. To give up their threatened faith—and there seemed scarcely any alternative before them—involved a more cruel wrench than to separate at the first from traditional Judaism, for Judaism was burdensome, exacting, and whilst tempered with tenderness was adapted to awaken their terror rather than to call forth their love. Jesus had brought new brightness into human life, and to all appearance the loss of Jesus would prove itself a most tragic loss of happiness. And for this new faith, they had entered upon sacrifices which, though hard at the time, had since been more than made good by the spiritual gains they had won. It is always heartbreaking to give up that for which we have made sacrifices. They had expected the kingdom of God to appear, and now the prospect, as they judged things, was hopeless. The gloom was deepening, and in a few hours they would see their

Prophet Friend bound like an offending slave. It looked as though no religion was left to them, for Judaism had called out their trust, and encouraged their hope, and if Jesus was not what they had thought, Judaism itself was discredited. It must be either continued faith in Jesus or blank distraction and dismay. No wonder the way was dark and the pressure put upon them heavy, and had they not accepted Christ's antidote to pessimism they must have spent the rest of their days as prophets of despair rather than as glad and fleet-footed heralds of good tidings.

And the gloom which so frequently settles upon large sections of society, and even upon the Church itself, is akin to that of the disciples when they were parting from their Lord, and had no fixed assurance of His spiritual return. The day of dogmatic irreligion is past, but underneath and behind our pessimism there is a relaxed faith in God and the promise of the gospel. We can no longer fall back upon natural religion, as did those whose faith in the Christian verities had declined, a generation or two ago. The belief in a personal and a loving God leads up to belief in Jesus Christ, and if we are compelled to abandon the maturer faith we must give up the more rudimentary faith likewise. Our belief often amounts to little more than a trust in the higher probabilities. We may be wrong, and if we are wrong the loss is all the more terrible because of the love we have given to Jesus Christ and to the God He manifests. The sadness of heart we often feel is accentuated because there has been so much enthusiasm and high hope in our faith, and we have been ready to count all things but loss

for this excellent knowledge. The loss of faith would not have afflicted us so grievously in an age of religious formalism, for we should not have had the same sense of privation. If we have been misled in our judgment concerning Jesus Christ, all that is worth having goes, and present and future are alike dark. No wonder the grim gloom should cling to our souls. We distrust the world, and our faith in Jesus Christ is not absolutely assured. We breathe the spirit of our religion with trembling and hesitation, not quite sure but that after all we may be breathing that which will poison our hope. When a man takes half-breaths he is in a condition of disease, which fact is true religiously. We cannot have a buoyant and a rejoicing life with a Divine bloom upon its every feature till we are rid of our dubitations. The pessimism of Church and world alike, takes its rise in an imperfectly assured faith.

Our very virtues make us sensitive to the unbelief which is working like a leaven of death amongst the men and women with whom our lot is cast. A growing reverence for man and his rights compels us to treat with greater respect than once the doubts and misgivings of our neighbours. There was a time when unbelief was found chiefly in the lips of ribald and loose-living men, but to-day it is rarely associated with the blaspheming temper. Grave scepticisms are sometimes found in the lips of innocence and integrity; and perhaps the danger to Christ's followers is greater than when unbelief was identified with so much that repelled.

Some years ago a volcanic eruption of unusual violence occurred in the Straits of Sunda, and showers of ash fell hundreds of miles away. It was

calculated that the force of the disturbance would have availed to carry the volcanic matter ejected three times round the earth. That matter, if brought together, would have filled a box as big as Hyde Park, and equal in height to the dome of St. Paul's. Skies far enough away from the centre of that disturbance were mysteriously darkened. And is it not thus with those agitations of thought which have been taking place in the world around us? Many an outbreak of unbelief may be far removed from our sight, and yet our sky is overcast, the atmosphere we breathe is clogged, and if the subtle forms of unbelief which so often penetrate our innermost life were to settle down upon the Churches, the cross and all the hopes it inspires must be for ever buried from our sight. We are sensitive to some of those upheavals of thought whose thunder never reaches the ear and with which we are not in direct contact. Their effects choke our prayers, weigh heavily upon the message of the pulpit, and pervade the brotherhood of Christ's disciples with a sense of unutterable gloom. The reigning tone of sadness in the world is due to its unbelief, and the murmurous melancholy of the Church is due to that half-belief which is an unconscious infection, depressing its moral forces whilst not perhaps entirely arresting its service.

And this process of disenchantment through which the disciples were passing *involved their vocation.* They were weighed down by a sense of utter helplessness supervening upon high dreams of useful service. Faith in their vocation could not possibly survive loss of faith in the Divine mission of Jesus Christ. The wonders wrought when they were first

sent forth, dwindled and all but ceased in the year of persecution. It may be that their faith was unequal to these mighty works, as they saw that their Master was the object of scorn, and possibly fated to die by violent hands. Perhaps the scene at the foot of the mountain, when they failed to cast out the unclean spirit, may have been the beginning of the temporary weakness. They had never thought of themselves as the heralds of a rejected king, and expected to do all their work and effect necessary reformations for truth and righteousness by benign and wisely directed force. Under these conditions of tragedy and apparent collapse, in the days immediately at hand, there seemed to be no place for them and their work.

And this failing sense of a vocation came to them at a time when their work as preachers of repentance and reformers of a corrupt state was more urgent than ever. They were only just beginning to know how bad was the world for whose uplifting they had toiled. They saw now into those depths of iniquity, unfathomable as hell itself, only too common in the pious officialism of the temple, and the insight was a nightmare from which there was no awakening. Oh, the sinister counsels of murder hidden behind those sleek, scholarly brows upon which they had been taught from their childhood upwards, to look with veneration! The Jew, with all his vaunted privilege and his wonderful history, was proving himself as bad, and perhaps a little worse, than the Gentile. And the Gentile was about to prove himself as corrupt and implacable as the Jew, and the oppression which had stung the disciples from childhood, and which they had hoped to sweep away by some heroic feat of arms,

was about to riot in a more savage triumph, and to crush the One who had been the object of their patient hope. The closing days of Christ's ministry might well leave them in despair, for Jesus had failed to cure a dark and diabolic treachery in the heart of a chosen apostle. The teaching and friendship of Jesus had left Judas a betrayer in heart and in act, blacker than when he first came into contact with the Prophet and Wonder-worker of Galilee. How could *they* hope to succeed? What a marvel it is the disciples did not become unbelieving misanthropists, men whose special work it should henceforth be to breathe upon the world the blight of distrust, rather than messengers of peace and goodwill! No wonder they were plunged into momentary sadness and despair.

And does not our experience often run parallel with that of the disciples? We are helpless, and with the waning of faith, the sense we once had of a Divine vocation, appears to forsake us. And at this very juncture we are gaining a new and heart-sickening glimpse into the world's woe and crime. We never appreciated the appalling magnitude of man's fall till the daily press taught us the significance of our theology. The ends of the world with all their terrible wickedness are brought into daily view. Slums, slave markets, shambles, every type of vice and degradation, the intrigue and cruelty of the palace, the perjuries of state departments, the brute cunning that works in rookery and den, all varieties of sensuality and avarice that demoniac ingenuity can devise, wild-beast lairs and charnel-houses are kept vividly before us by the reporting Hogarths of our newspapers. It sometimes seems as though the hand

which put the essence of the world's bitter shame and sin into the pure soul of the Man of Sorrows, were forcing upon us a new sense of these tragic facts. And we are in despair. We have hoped too much from the march of civilisation, the enlargement of education, social reform. An inward emancipation is needed besides all these things, and we are more helpless than ever to bring it to pass.

We cannot forget that we are a part of this sinning, suffering world, and that it would be heartless in us to close our eyes to the miserable spectacle. Something is ever reminding us of the solidarity of the race. We have kinsfolk and possibly children who are in a land that is full of slums and unholy pitfalls. The outside shadow persists in crossing the threshold. The world is not a safe place for our frank-spoken children whilst it is full of commercial iniquities. Whilst there is a slum left in it, my child may drift into that slum. Till we grapple with these giant evils of the world which call for redress, God does not mean us to be other than sad as we look upon it. The iniquities which are round about us cast the shadow of a sickening fear, and it falls for a moment on our bright-haired children. We cannot have joy, and it would be ill for us if we could, till we receive fulness of power. If we have a vocation we must have effectual power to work it out, and whilst that power is lacking we shall feel that we are living as idle spectators of pain rather than as saviours of society. And we must have a baptism of power commensurate with our enlarged view of the world's sin and bitter need. New realms in the empire of darkness have been brought within the range of our knowledge. We need a new equipment of strength and courage,

and it is fitting we should mourn till the equipment is obtained. The sadness of the present day is due not so much to the dark pictures of wretchedness that are brought before us, as to a new sense of our helplessness. Christianity, in many of its forms, seems to have lost the sense of its vocation to liberate and redeem men. It is tempted, and the temptation is very strong, to look upon evil as inevitable and to succumb to a disastrous temper of fatalism.

A few weeks ago one of the medical journals pointed out the fact that in the next naval war the surgeon on a battleship would be able to render very little help to the wounded whilst the action was going on. One part of the ship is locked off from another by iron doors, and whilst limbs were being shattered and blood shed he would be shut up within his own room. Such a position would be terrible for a humane man to contemplate. It would be enough to turn his brain to hear piteous appeals for help, and to have professional fitness to heal and to save, and yet to be denied his opportunity by these inexorable barriers of steel. And the thoughtful and right-hearted man of the present day who has not yet received power from on high, is the prisoner of his own unconquerable weakness and incapacity. Tragic sin, and all its sickening accompaniments of destruction, is at his very doors, and he is helpless. It was once my painful lot to watch the havoc of a typhoon from a mountain-side, and all human strength was helpless against those terrific forces. Great steamers dragged their anchors and drifted out to sea ; scores of smaller craft were crushed to splinters, and the heads of those for whom there was no hope of salvation darkened the massive and turbulent waves. It is our paralysis

in the midst of this sinning and suffering world which explains the gloom that so often overspreads the Churches. Jesus Christ has called us to act with Him for the redemption of mankind. He has invested us with a power we do not realise. We are sent to open prison doors, and yet we ourselves are as pitifully powerless as though chains weighed down every limb. We are called the lights of the world, and yet we flicker and fail, and our own little natures are often in partial darkness. He has called us salt, and yet it is as much as we can do to keep our own homes from the corruption which festers in the world. We cannot be joyful till we rise to the full measure of our vocation. Our joy will never blend with that of the angels till we can move men to repentance. This fulness of delight for which we are commanded to ask can only connect itself with a richer endowment of power.

Is Christ's antidote to pessimism effectual? Try it. Can this deep and pitiful sadness be dispelled by heeding the word Jesus spake to His disciples? If not our doubt of Jesus may be justified, and we may venture to think of our vocation as a myth, and of God's desire for fellowship with mortals as a cruel flattery.

Are soul-racking uncertainties at the root of our sadness? The Holy Spirit will remove them and restore our halting faith in God and God's redeeming Son. It was thus the disciples recovered their half-lost faith, and from the sorrow of the cross which had staggered them they were taught to draw their solace and their lofty hope. This gracious Comforter made the spiritual presence of the exalted Lord just as real as the presence of flesh and blood which had once

tarried with them. We live in fluctuating dreams because we do not know the innermost secret of the Spirit's ministry. Joy in the Holy Ghost is the portion of every man who comes into unreserved oneness of affection and life with God. When we ask and receive this gift we shall no longer be disturbed by the haunting thought that God may be a scintillation of poetry, eternity a vacuous dream, and Jesus Christ an idealised hero of the past. But that which we are to ask in the all-availing name, so that our joy may be full, does not stop short at reconciliation with God. Our deepest instincts will not be satisfied till the secret of effectual service is taught to us by the Divine Spirit. The last lingering gloom that settles upon us can only be banished by the glory of the Pentecost, with its tongues of sacred flame. The new gladness will come to us when we have power to do our part in changing the face of the world. And with this mystic baptism we shall recover our joy in that outer world whose chaos and convulsion so often sadden us. We shall gain an insight into the invisible sovereignty of grace which rules in the turmoil of the passing hour, and will yet bring peace out of pain, concord out of anarchy and confusion, and resplendent sanctity out of weltering guilt and baseness. The wholesome pleasures of the present life we shall then take as angels' food from the hand of God. This poor, sad world will begin to look like the home of God's children again, and will have for us all the charm and gladness of home. And when that better day comes we shall look back upon our pessimisms as the brief chastisement of our impotence and unbelief. "Ask and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full." Boundless satisfactions are made ready for

us, and the Master whom we have grieved by our mistrust reproaches us because we have asked nothing in His name. We shall find the crowning joy of life when we rise into a truer fellowship with God and His work. Let us come to God, the spring of infinite blessedness, through Jesus Christ, and we shall find the veil that once darkened our eyes not only thin but rent from top to bottom.

XIV

POWER THROUGH INSIGHT

"The Son can do nothing of Himself but what He seeth the Father doing; for whatsoever things He doeth these also the Son doeth in like manner. For the Father loveth the Son and sheweth all things that Himself doeth."—JOHN v. 19, 20.

THESE words occur as a part of Christ's apology for an act of Sabbath-healing at the pool of Bethesda. They shed wonderful light upon the mysterious relation of the Son to His Divine Father, and affirm that His power to heal and to save, to judge and to raise men from both natural and spiritual death in the new kingdom just dawning, was determined by His insight into the Divine counsels and activities. The precept, the pattern, and the effectual force for His unexampled achievements lay in a realm that was hidden from common eyes. He waited upon the Father and watched the special set of His purpose towards each man, woman, and child, whose path intersected His own, and miracles of inward and outward salvation were wrought, by linking on His own word and gesture to that which the Father was doing, and so keeping Himself in unison with heaven.

But this illuminating word seems to travel beyond the incarnate life, and to define the relation in which the different persons of the Godhead stand to each

other. The Son does and speaks only the things which He sees and hears ; and the work of the Spirit doubtless follows the same analogy. The Trinitarian doctrine, rightly stated, needs no shamefaced defence at the present hour when science, just as much as theology itself, runs counter to our traditional knowledge and experience. Weissman in his book on Heredity tells us that every monad is theoretically as old as the primitive monad from which it has come, for when the mode of reproduction is by fission the organisms that under other conditions would be described as parent and offspring, are of one substance and coeval in time. It would be unseemly to illustrate thus the great sacred mystery which is at the foundation of the Christian faith, but the fact shows that the modern biologist has often to state things in terms which may be made to appear just as absurd as the dogmas of theology. But though the doctrine of the Triune God is not likely to be soon discredited, it must be allowed that orthodox Christians often use loose and misleading language upon the subject. A rude and undiscriminating zeal for the dogma exaggerates the distinctions of the persons, and three separate infinites are postulated, Father, Son, and Spirit being spoken of as though they were a triple alliance of celestial kings. The unity of the Divine nature is obscured by misjudged language, and the taunt that the Catholic Church believes in three gods instead of one is half justified. But the acts of the Godhead are common to all the persons comprehended in it. The Son is not a separate rival deity, such as the Tempter proposed to make of Adam by the magic of transgression.

The life of the Son was an eternal and continuous gift from the Father, and all His work was wrought by that insight into the Divine counsels which never failed Him.

And yet He was no mere manifestation of the Divine existence, but possessed an abiding personality which enabled Him always to discern the purpose of the Father, and at the centre of that personality was a free acting will, through which He chose to co-operate with this purpose. On the part of the Father there was a continuous revelation, and on the part of the Son a continuous openness to the revelation, and a high fellowship of work with the Father which was never once broken.

The discourse which interprets the narrative incident immediately preceding it, brings before us three characteristics of the work of the Father as that work presented itself to the mind of the Son who was the watchful and untiring ally of its processes.

The story of the paralytic by the pool shows that it was *a work of healing and salvation*, befitting the love which enwraps the creation in all its parts. In ways beyond our range Jesus knew that God is love and that love must heal, wherever it can get into close contact with human woe. We hold this as a theory, and in some vague way anticipate, sooner or later, the operation of remedial forces. But Jesus saw it as a living fact working itself out under His very eyes. If natural remedies availed for human ills, He would doubtless see in such remedies outward tokens of the healing presence of His Father, consecrated emblems of the eternal love, not to be lightly despised or set aside. He was no Manichee who looked upon the outward vesture of things as though it were a

poisoned texture prepared by the malice of fiends. He had never lost His direct apprehension of that boundless and unchanging charity out of whose bosom He came, and came too that He might be its visible herald and instrument. Could we only know it, the remedial forces of Divine grace are always playing around this maimed and guilty life of humanity, about its visible and invisible sides alike. Agencies which are ordained to soothe and strengthen, to lift up and deliver, are all pervasive as Jehovah Himself, and are eager to overleap the restrictions of days and seasons, festivals and holy places, so that they may everywhere renew men to youth and gladness. Alas for it that we are blind to these benign energies and so slow to become their channels!

These secret *forces of recuperation are stable and continuous.* The Father's gracious doing, like His mysterious being itself, is an everlasting Now running parallel with the unresting movements of the world. The outgoings of help and vivifying virtue are not rare, spasmodic, intermittent, like the troubling of the poor paltry pool. Those gifted with the insight of faith and skilled to read the thought of God, may count upon these things just as safely as upon the ordered certainties of the visible universe. This sphere of mystic help and healing is always nigh, brooding over our heads, touching us night and day in the very core of our history with the earnest of salvation; but alas for us, we are so set upon earthly things, so prone to that which is beneath rather than above, so absorbed by all that lies upon the surface of the veil and so dull to the sublime mysteries it hides, that we do not discover the law. This Divine power was waiting for its human instrument in the Son, and it is still waiting

for co-operating instruments in the disciples of the Son.

Our position in presence of these secret remedial benignities is like that of a race of unlettered men into whose hands medical libraries, stores of efficacious drugs, and the ingenious devices of modern surgery have come. Great possibilities of healing are within reach, but the possibilities are sealed up because of the gross and all-pervading ignorance in which the poor savages are steeped ; and in spite of the marvellous facilities which are in their actual possession, men and women die of every type of disease in swarms. The forces of health and life and spiritual redemption are about us everywhere, but they will be futile unless we are wise to see and take hold and interpret.

And the Son of Man was able to grasp with vivid force *the immediate and specific application of the Father's will and compassionate work to this forlorn sufferer.* In pronouncing him healed and bidding him arise and walk, He was not acting upon mere theories or reasoning from the general to the particular. Reflected in the thought of the Father He saw this cripple of thirty-eight years with all the marks of his wretchedness, and was quite assured that it was the Divine purpose to lift him up and make him new, even now, and that the Father was already working towards this transcendent consummation. God's cheering sunrise was already breaking in upon the deep despair of the sufferer's lot and the hour of redemption was upon the stroke.

And when we learn Christ's method and do good after His unfailing pattern, we shall see how, in the passing moment, God is already set upon doing the

good of which we are the privileged instruments. We shall win men to contrition if we have a spiritual conviction of the fact that God has been working within them to that end and we are only helpers of a Divine process. We shall guide docile children to lives of consecration if we see how God's gracious hand is already bending the fresh, tender nature to such welcome issues. We shall shed precious consolation into broken hearts if we know that the fiat has been spoken which is to create new gladness, and that we are appointed messengers in this ministry of love.

This idea, which was the ruling note in Christ's work, appears under a varied form in the signs and wonders of the first apostles. Peter and John gazed upon those whom they were chosen to lift up and to heal, as though they were scanning the under-deeps of the soul to find tokens there of God's purpose and initiating act. The same intention seems to speak in the firm-set eye Paul turned upon those to whom he was as an angel of God. But there is a characteristic distinction in the methods. Christ looked up into heaven and in the mirror of the Father's mind saw the figures of those He was destined to help and heal. It was into the minds of suffering men on earth that the apostles looked so that they might catch there proofs of God's will and working. The face of the one was turned to heaven to read the earnest of better things in the life of earth ; the faces of the others were turned manwards so that they might apprehend the counsel and work of God operating in human souls. Herein is a distinction, both of character and essential being, between Christ and His servants. His consciousness travelled from its

home in God to earth and to the knowledge of man by the tracks of that Divine thought which was turning to the human sufferer. Our consciousness begins with man and ascends thence to the knowledge of God's counsels and saving acts.

Contemplation and activity were harmonised in Christ's life, and the one is presented as the mainspring of the other. A bond existed between Christ's watching and doing that was close and indissoluble. Looking stedfastly upon the Father He read His high intent and kept Himself in accord with the counsels of each succeeding hour, and so had power to act effectually upon men. With us, alas ! these two sides of religion are too often divorced. On the one hand there is an activity abroad which apparently takes little account of God, and on the other there are self-absorbed and self-centred forms of piety which seem to take little account of man and his dire extremity of distress. We are the victims of a pitiful onesidedness. This man is all hurry, bustle, boisterous movement, well-meant but ostentatious diligence ; and the other is all quietism, unresisting passivity, intellectual self-centredness, eager to look on the beauty of the Lord, and to be so swept away by its entrancements that the world and its woeful struggle and transgression will pass out of view. Some set themselves to the service of God and humanity without those high qualifying sanctifications which come from near converse with and the intuitive sense of His counsels ; so zealous are they for social reforms that they leave the question of personal religious experience to take care of itself for the time. For the uplifting of humanity they will even be beholden

to a statesmanship which is flagrantly immoral, if it be only adroit and influential. The fact is left out of view that no man can be a true instrument for the healing of mankind who is blind to what is Divine, and out of league with those holy forces which centre themselves in spiritual kingdoms. On the other hand some of us crave for a religion which spends its days on the Mount of Transfiguration and leaves the groaning world to shift for itself.

Now we need to copy the example of Jesus Christ and unite these two aspects of religion. He lived so entirely in heaven because He lived so intensely on earth and needed the strength of the one to complement the helplessness of the other. He was compelled to fly for succour on behalf of those He pitied to the presence of the Father's love and power. He is our pattern, and, like Him, we must first look Godward and then act under the constraint of what we have seen. From the throne in heaven there are saving and restoring energies descending to assuage the woes of men, and if we are to do work Christlike in its value and blessedness, we must co-operate with those descending energies. The labourer must be what the Old Testament describes as a Seer, and the Seer whose eyes God has opened, is the only man equipped to be such a labourer together with God, that his acts will be fraught with salvation. This ideal is realised in the angels who guard the children, for Christ says, "They do always behold the face of My Father which is in heaven," and they doubtless do their tender and sacred work the more victoriously because they move in harmony with their visions of high privilege.

An Eastern philosophy asserts that soul stillness is

the secret of all power. No feat, it declares, is beyond the range of the man who can bring himself into a state of absolute passivity. He who can hush his own heart passes at once from the circumference of being with its strident babels and its futile turmoils to the mystic centre of rest, and can place his hand on the controlling forces of the universe. There is an appearance of truth in that vague speculative fantasy. When we reach the true centre of things we shall see that God is the great, tireless, effectual worker, and a more intense and availing type of power will then dawn within us.

The *humility which underlies this declaration* is just as profound as its claim of power and privilege is lofty. Christ had just asserted that He was one with God—so at least the Jews understood His words—and yet all must have felt that He was the lowliest man in the crowd. Not one there would have put himself in a position of such pathetic dependence on the Divine Father. The angels had worshipped Him by Divine decree, and yet He was under no temptation to make Himself into an independent God, for He boldly confessed that all His power was the Father's gift. By His mediation the universe with its wonders had been made; and what an enormous demonstration of energy that was! And yet He avows His constant indebtedness to the initiative of another. He would be less than vanity but for His insight into the Father's will and His apprehension of the Father's help. Till the Father gave a sign He could not heal the most trifling malady or banish the slightest pain. It was alike beyond His will and beyond His power. The energy of which He was the channel was a bestowment of the Eternal, and He did not wish to

possess it as a separate property of His personal being. He did what we fail to do, although it should be so much easier to us, because of our inferior rank in the scale of power and intelligence; looking into the deeps of His own consciousness He saw that His ability to act upon human life was bestowed by the Father's love, just as much as the skill and strength of common men whose breath is in God's hand. It was His unique prerogative to give back lost life, and to give it upon a scale of inconceivable magnitude. He was to judge tremendous issues, to absolve or condemn the untold millions of men and women who through successive centuries live out their term of years upon earth; and yet in His own strength He could not put a tinge of health upon the wasted cheek of a forlorn paralytic. Because of His work of unexampled love, supreme honour was to invest Him and He was to wear upon His head many crowns; and yet, disjoined from the Father, He accounted Himself nothing and less than vanity. At the roots of His marvellous work there is a temper of pathetic and incomparable lowliness. He is the most consummate and effectual of all workers, and yet He achieves His inimitable tasks as a discerner of the Father's processes in the hearts and lives around Him. He is an interpreter who puts the immeasurable love and power of the Godhead into the terms of space and time. He sees His gracious Father moved with pity to suffering sinners and upon the point of sending help and deliverance, and that which He sees He proclaims by word and sign and act, making Himself the apostle of these celestial purposes. How often do we stretch forth the hand to command and direct men or run at our

own will before we have received the vision of what the Father is doing! This self-exaltation of the worker, who should be a channel and an instrument only, is at the root of all mortification, emptiness, and defeat. We fondly dream that there are inherent and inexhaustible resources within us, and we need not be beholden to the momentary gifts of God. We are capable, and our great endowments shall be used to promote human good; and inasmuch as that is our temper, our work turns out hollow, evanescent, infertile. His own attitude towards the Father, Jesus makes the pattern of our attitude towards Himself. "Without Me ye can do nothing." As Mediator He interprets the Father's purpose to those who live in fellowship with Himself and His work.

The largest measure of power which can energise and ennoble human life, belongs to that man who is cognisant of the purpose and sleepless working of the Father of all love and consolation. The task Jesus had to accomplish in His earthly humiliation was to keep Himself in harmony with the outgoing of those transcendent forces of which His own holy personality had been the vehicle from the beginning. He found Himself in a world dominated by pride bred in the first act of rebellion, where men were trying to be gods in their own right, hoping to achieve the most pretentious changes and victories by the skill and prowess of their own hands. As reverent workers for God and humanity our task is to discover the benign and invincible forces already at play and to put ourselves in step with them. To explore all the known and unknown attractions which are vibrating around us, and to bend ourselves deftly to their currents is the supreme art of natural

life. A child begins to do this in acquiring the power of bodily movement. Physical science must advance along those lines. The top stone will be put upon our material civilisations when every energy that traverses our earth has been tracked home and captured and man has ascertained the utmost it can do for him. It has been a wonder to observant naturalists that our largest birds seem to fly without effort. They soar into the air without fluttering a feather and keep pace with the fastest ocean by a knack of facile skimming. It is supposed that they utilise with wonderful cunning and discernment diverse currents of air in the different strata of the atmosphere, turning various angles of the body to the rhythmic pulses of the wind, for there is a measured beat in the fury of the loudest storm. The greatest of inventors cannot avail himself of an undiscovered force, any more than the craftiest yachtsman can sail his boat in the doldrums. In presence of an undetected affection of matter a Faraday, a Lord Kelvin, a Clerk-Maxwell is just as helpless as a Stone Age savage. There may be occult laws about us through the discovery and employment of which man may make himself into a new species.

And that is so in the spiritual world. We may rise to unknown power when we get gleams of what God is doing and put ourselves into entire harmony with it. The problem of the higher and the nobler life is how to link ourselves with the unresting processes of the great spiritual universe. We can no more work in the best causes without God and adjustment to His unsleeping benignities and recuperations than we can run counter to the material laws which bring

hosts of suns under their imperial mastery. Jesus Christ could not do it. Without the presence and co-operation of His Father, He felt Himself helpless as the most fragile organism. Neither in this nor in a preceding life had He been accustomed to act apart from the lead and bidding of His Father, and He could not conceive it possible that He could act independently, even if He wished.

Not only does Jesus confess His inability to do work with the Divine stamp upon it apart from the Father, but He claims that the conditions of insight and co-operation have been so consistently fulfilled that He has been *a participator in all the feats of His Father's love and power*. There never was a time, He intimates, when the high distinction of being a co-worker with the Eternal was denied Him. Throughout the unbroken round of His incarnate and preincarnate life, He had kept Himself in exact and clear-seeing adjustment with the supreme work and will, so that this privilege of co-operation had never for a moment been forfeited. It was His to abide in a realm of light where the work of the Father was always clear, and from the beginning of creation He had had a recognised part in that work. He made the worlds, kindled suns, fashioned and animated man. He had been the light of the Gentiles and mediated all the ministries of the Old Testament, coming as God's messenger to the patriarchs and showing Himself a redeeming angel of the elect race in all times of peril and distress. Never had His ministry been set aside, for He was always so sensitive to the Father's will and so zealous for the Father's counsels that whatsoever the Father did, the same had the Son done in like manner.

Pitiably flickering is our view of what the Father is doing, and our power of taking an intelligent and honourable part in His glorious plans is proportionately limited. We see His work as we see a dreamy outline of some far-off snowy range at the moment of sunrise, or a cloud-like headland in the transient glow of the sunset. We see His work as we look through columns of driving mist or the rush of thick rain-clouds, upon the tasks of our fellows. We get just one glimpse of the sower pacing the fields, or the excavator cutting the rock, or the pilot making for the haven, and then all is lost again, and for aught we can see or hear the world might be dead. But the mists which hide God's work from us are upon our own eyes and the inky vapours which baffle us in our wish to be His co-workers rise out of the passions seething within us. It is by purifying men's hearts that Christ enlightens their eyes, and when His enlightenment comes we see the Father not as a statuesque Deity waiting for worship, but as a strenuous worker. By His revelations the Son of God makes it possible for us to take some humble part in the Father's work.

But this insight, which was at the root of His most amazing works, was in no sense an attainment of His inherent genius. He was both now and heretofore dependent upon the will of His Father. The great King of heaven made Him the confidant of His own unceasing work. The ends and processes of the eternal counsels were communicated to the consciousness of the Son for the simple reason that the Father loved the Son—loved Him, that is, with passionate approval and unqualified complacency. And if God is well pleased with us, parallel although fainter,

revelations will dawn upon our consciousness. Our insight and that power of genuine ministry which grows up out of insight, are already proportioned to the degree of our acceptance with God. If more piercing insight and more magnificent power were vouchsafed to us upon our present low level of religious life, what use should we make of these things but go about the world trying to pose as gods in our own right, soliciting homage, tacitly beseeching men to worship us? Our dependence must be as unreserved as that of the Son, if our strength for action and our capability for spiritual vision are to be increased. God will put the clews of His work into our hands and privilege us to assist its victories, if He is well pleased with us. Into some of the great factories of the world no stranger is admitted. The secret of the process is jealously kept. There are crafts the knowledge of which is conveyed only to the lineal descendant of the first discoverer. When the student, artist, designer, takes his neighbour into the inner chambers and talks over all that is being projected there, it is a mark of close and welcome friendship. Man touches the highest dignity of his being when the Most High treats him thus, and admits him to share His counsels and forward His work. That was the distinction of the Son, the crowning glory of His personality, and it may be our distinction likewise through the Son; for, said He, the Father loved the disciples because they had loved their Master and had believed that the Father had sent Him. The last proof of Christ's friendship with His disciples was that He gave them insight into His purpose and work. "I call you not servants but friends, for the servant knoweth not what his lord

doeth." Servants we may be and trusty in character, but we do not rise to the high rank of friends unless we have something of this insight, and of the power which comes through insight.

But it may be said that this is impracticably high and can have little significance for men whose lot is cast in a sordid world, where they have to keep their wits about them so that they may buy and sell and get gain. Such assumptions may become Jesus the Prince of Mystics, for His experiences were not altogether normal. It is right and proper for visionaries who have a genius for spiritual things and who obey a special vocation in withdrawing from men and living in retreats. The average Christian, who sets himself to keep the ten commandments, has quite enough to do and cannot afford to strain after these unworldly conditions of thought and feeling. It doubtless is so, but unless men bring themselves more nearly to Christ's standpoints, they may possibly find the keeping of the mere commandments a more difficult task than Jesus found His momentous and far-pulsating life-work. The Fate which tempered our clay, we are ready to assert, did not make us for glimpses of the eternal whilst we are in the fevered atmosphere of the exchange or moiling away at the drudgery of book-keeping; that is to say, we look upon the first birth and the peculiar impulse it originates as final, and we distrust the power which is pledged to make us spiritual. Of course we must learn to see God, if we are to pass into the circle of the heavenlies and see God's work whilst it is yet struggling to birth in human history, for it is only thus that we can ally ourselves with all the things He is stretching out His hand to do. Before the

evangelical promise had been fulfilled—"I will sprinkle clean water upon you and make you clean" —men saw, like the prophet's servant at Dothan, the spiritual instruments of God's providential work. It is our higher distinction to see God with some faint apprehension here and now, and if we attain that we shall share in some humble degree the Saviour's vision of what He is doing, and be able to enter into the fellowship of His work. Where this high vision is wanting the heart is befouled and the "Christian Science" which assumes that God's all-healing power can be realised by men and women living in flagrant sin, and communicated by professional adepts, is a blasphemy that makes one shudder. We shall see His face and be permitted to co-operate with His work by interpreting it to those who are about us, when we have been inwardly and outwardly sanctified into submission to His counsels.

But is not such purity of heart a far-off hope only, and was not our Lord's faculty of vision and of work, in its higher ranges at least, His incommunicable distinction as the only begotten Son of the Father? There is a spiritual clairvoyance which is of common grace and not a hereditary gift resting upon a remarkable person here or there. "And put no difference between them and us, purifying their hearts by faith." In this free evangelical process the distinction between Jew and Gentile, yea also between the greatest and least in the kingdom of God, melts away. The second-sight we need so that we may do Christ's works, is that which comes through the washing away of the gross clay too often cleaving to our vision. For such insight as Christ declared was at the basis of His own words

we have no constitutional disability. Our experience shows most truly that when the work of the Father is veiled from us it is by the passions that smoulder in our natures. After God has kindled the light of love within us, we fall back into envy, selfishness, bad temper, resentment, and cannot therefore see God's work in those around us. We can find nothing in our neighbour but a transgressor to be chastised, a pretender to be humiliated, a man who is getting more than he deserves and who must be despoiled and brought low, rather than a sinner to be forgiven, a slave to be made free, a sufferer to be restored. When we cease to dwell in love we cease to dwell in God, and cannot be cognisant of the work of God in, around, and through us. Jesus came to reveal the Father, and, as a first step in revealing the Father, to give us insight into the Father's work, and he must do that by purifying our hearts. We are blind to His work because the mirror in which we must needs watch it is so deeply and foully stained. We come by the living way into the holy place, not only that we may present our homage before a Being of ineffable majesty but that we may catch glimpses of a matchless Worker who is ever stretching out His hand to help and to heal; and it is only thus that we can become linked with His operations and help to further them by our lowly service.

XV

CUMULATIVE GRACE

"And of His fulness have all we received, and grace for grace."—JOHN i. 16.

THE grace received from Christ's fulness is not always to be measured by the conscious apprehension we have of its presence and operation within us. We sometimes receive favours and benefits from each other, and our knowledge goes no further back than to the hand which bestows, whilst all the while friends of whom we do not think have intervened to produce those conditions of kindness and goodwill which have been working for our good. In mind, body, and estate we may chance to be indebted to ancestors, the very tradition of whose name has been lost. A tribe of Indians on a reservation is kept alive in days of famine by food, or healed in days of sickness by medicines, sent through the ordinary Government channels, but bestowed by a benefactor whose name they have never heard. So many a spiritual gift comes from Christ which we are too dull and untutored to trace back to His all-availing ministries. His work and personality assert themselves in the eternal counsel which seeks our welfare as well as

through all the stages of our ascent into conscious spiritual life.

Three things distinguish Christ's influence upon the world from the influence exercised by the noblest spirits of the race. Men of genius or uncommon virtue quicken our pulses, stir dormant faculties into movement, help us to discover ourselves and to utilise our best resources. Jesus Christ seems to add something to us we did not previously possess, and His influence is not so much educational as creative. There has been a transfusion of new qualities into our veins, and as our religious consciousness grows we become increasingly confident of the fact. We can analyse the kind of power wielded over us by men who have had some little share in moulding our character and directing the thinking life. It is easy for us to say at what point this teacher or that reformer has impressed himself upon us for good. We can follow the specific tracks by which the magnetic virtue has come to revive and exalt our personalities. But Christ touches us by so many blended and interacting processes that analysis is baffled and definition impossible. It would be like trying to specify the points at which a warm, health-restoring wind plays upon the senses. It simply enswathes us, mixing with every breath and permeating every pore. His unknown mediations have been about every part of our life from the beginning, suffusing and transforming the whole. He teaches, allures, befriends, delivers, sanctifies for blessedness and immortal honour, and it is all but impossible to say in what respect our debt is greatest. His benign touch is upon human life in so many ways that John does not venture to enumerate the gifts which flow from His fulness. The

bestowment is more than we can compute, and includes many a gift we fail to connect with His name. There is nothing of help, privilege, or promise in our lives that His bountiful ministry has not put there. And the range of His influence is incomparably wide. Other men touch narrow circles. Those who influence their contemporaries often seem to exhaust themselves in the act, and those who are slighted by their contemporaries sometimes have weight with after-generations. For the masses around us, many names standing high on the roll of fame, are empty sounds only, and the ideas they represent are current in a select school. Jesus Christ conveys Himself, and at least some of the benefits of His work, to the undivided race. He is not the man of a class, a continent, an epoch, but all are beholden to His persuasive spirit and His illuminating example.

The law of grace which has its fountain-head in Jesus Christ, rules not only in the moral and spiritual spheres of our life but in the intellectual likewise, inhibiting pride in those most tempted to it by the splendour of their achievements. Uncommon excellence in art, music, poetry, statesmanship, we describe as an inspiration, and the word implies a favoured atmosphere from which there has been a bountiful and exhilarating intake. The best pictures, symphonies, hymns, and lyrics make themselves, and come to the attending mind with the swiftness and the facility of dreams. The noblest ideas we conceive are those which thrust themselves upon us unbidden rather than those which are long wooed and tediously elaborated, as though God were always set upon hiding pride from men. It is not

necessary for us to settle the question whether the sudden leap into the scheme of a perfect masterpiece is due to the slow accumulation of ancestral culture or is an immediate gift of God to the imagination; but the fact remains, and the masterpiece has started up within the soul in obedience to other energies than those which have been painfully battling there, or, in Bible words, it is of grace and not of works. Genius is sometimes said to be "the art of taking pains," and whilst the definition may be a useful antidote to the schoolboy's listlessness, it is untrue to fact, for most of the things which we regard as the victories of genius have suddenly flown into the soul on unseen wings. Now and again an untaught child is capable of mental feats that baffle the expert, and the prodigy is unable to explain the method by which the wonderful thing is done. The more genius a man has the larger will be his debt to inspirations which obey a law beyond his own control. One, distinguished both as poet and sculptor, has said, "Our best work is done when we are possessed by an idea, not when we are striving after one. When all is fit, and the spirit of man is receptive, the idea suddenly comes upon us, without our will and without our power to compel or resist its coming. An influence rules you which is beyond your grasp of understanding, which sways you to its motions. It would be the greatest folly in an artist to be vain, nor do I understand how a truly great genius can be vain. He obeys something which he can neither understand nor govern. What the artist can do is to keep his instrument in tune."

This principle which dominates man's intellectual life is yet more impressively asserted in the processes of his spiritual history. If an occult impulse comes

to the brain so that its greatest feats are achieved with little or no conscious effort, is it conceivable that the noblest forth-puttings of his Godward nature should be an effect of strain, discipline, or laboured works of righteousness? To see pure beauty is not an accomplishment but a privilege and a distinction freely bestowed upon elect souls; surely, then, the fitness to see the Divine face itself does not come by the pains of a slow and weary education but must be God-imparted. That insight which is salvation cannot be reached by the unaided exercise of our normal faculties. Man can only be the recipient of light, peace, spiritual freedom, and righteousness. His release from guilt and bondage is brought to him on swift pinions from God's throne, and he can never forge by toils of his own the key which is to unlock prison doors. It is by no mortal art that the foulness cleaving to the conscience can be cleansed and the transgressor changed into a man whom God approves. Character, when it is of surpassing excellence, is not built but created. The best things within us do not come from the resources of the natural man but from the grace ministered to us by an indwelling Christ. At the most we can only "keep the instrument in tune" and hold ourselves ready to welcome and entertain the gifts that descend upon us. Grace invests and pervades us on every side, and the loftier our achievement the more keenly alive shall we be to the fact that the power which has wrought within us is not our own. It is an inspiration from afar. If we rightly understand the principle of God's economies, our attitude will be one of vigilant and unwavering receptiveness.

The words "grace for grace" imply that increase

in spiritual things works itself out by a stable, a cumulative, and a carefully ordered law. Grace in its simple beginnings within the soul flows down from Christ's fulness—a fulness corresponding to the age-long and ever-expanding needs of a deathless race. That fulness is designed for the general enrichment of mankind, and upon a scale of growing munificence. To those who guard and faithfully use the earlier degrees of grace, the great Giver will go on to surpass Himself by bestowments of nobler magnitude. The increment is from less to more, and from more to boundless affluence. This principle of active grace may be traced in ever-expanding developments through all the processes of man's inner salvation. It is present in the imperfect religious capacities of infancy and childhood; its extended range may be seen when conversion has come, and there is a fixed consciousness of the Divine favour; it is the secret mainspring of effectual service; it multiplies itself at every step of the growth into sanctity of life; and it culminates in that life beyond the obscuring veils of earth which awaits those who are joined to Jesus Christ.

The fulness of grace in Christ is such that *from the first faint dawn of consciousness in the human soul He acts against the darkening and debasing effects of the Fall.* It is the fashion of the hour to argue against the doctrine of human depravity, and so to minimise the need for redemptive grace. Cases are adduced in which children seem to have passed into a life of devotion to God without any experience of actual sin, and scarcely showing a single sign that they belong to a race corrupt in its inmost thought. They are illustrations, it is claimed, of perfect natural virtue

from the beginning. A youth with hereditary lung disease is sent to the highlands of Natal, or to one of the dry, warm climates of the southern hemisphere, and lives to be an old man of eighty. You have no right to scoff at the physician's diagnosis, for the disease was there and would have reappeared if he had come back prematurely to his native land. Death sustained the doctor's judgment in the case of a youth in the adjoining street, who had not the means of escape to a country in which the disease might have been arrested. The most delightful illustrations of natural virtue are insufficient to discredit this grim old doctrine, because we can never see the evil of the heart, isolated from the secret remedial influences that come into play to check and qualify it. To disprove the doctrine of depravity, we should have to demonstrate that the people whose saintship has been life-long, passed into a state of consecration to God and sympathy with His counsels without the help of grace operating through the forgotten periods of their history. We should have to show that in childhood the Spirit of Jesus left them to their own free instincts, and that they continued innocent through some innate power of temperament; but to show that is impossible. The first germs of sin were not absent, but dealt with by methods of gentle and silent counteraction. Depravity and the grace that removes it are not always as rigidly successive as the different dynasties of the Pharaohs. We must not assume that in the history of the soul there is necessarily a term of unchecked sin followed by a term of triumphant grace with nothing to resist its sovereign forces. Grace contends with sin from the beginning, though we have not always been conscious of the fact. The

babes in some orphan home are fed and tended by the goodwill of its founder, and taste the savour of his blessed compassions, before they can lisp his name or grasp the methods of the great charity to which they are debtors. We cannot measure the world's participation in Christ's grace by the sense it has of obligation to His name and work, far less the influence of His redemptive work upon the world's little ones.

The seeds of natural death are always in us. Poisons, microbes, deadly ferments enter the frame with almost every breath, but these swarming malignancies are sterilised and destroyed before they have had time to effect the mischief they threaten. And we maintain ourselves in a very creditable state of health for years, in spite of the fact that these organisms insinuate themselves into our tissues with every breath we draw. So with the grace which counteracts the depravity cleaving, in some sense, to all of us. Never let us call true virtue natural. Unless we can unravel and trace back to their true origins all the influences working in the human soul for its uplifting and refinement we cannot be competent judges of the question. There is a subtle force at work, called by old-fashioned theologians "prevenient grace," and apart from the sweetening and purifying influence of that force, we might find it difficult even to love our own children. It is from this they get their angelic sweetness and fascination, and not from the flesh of which they are born. That which we describe as the new birth, or the beginning of conscious religious life, is simply the exchange of a lower for a higher degree of grace, a grace bestowed without our asking, for a richer grace we set ourselves intelligently to receive.

From the very outset of life, grace, in some of its degrees, is poured into our natures. Just as in old-fashioned districts of our country the infant of a few days' old is presented with a coin for luck's sake, and the coin is possibly treasured for years; and a half-crown is thrust into the pocket of a lad when he goes to his first school; and the gift of a gold piece is looked upon as the earnest of his coming fortune when he enters upon business life; so from the very dawn of intelligence and responsibility God starts us with some measure of grace in our souls. The unbaptized child is not reprobate and God-forsaken, nor is the baptized child supernaturally renewed in virtue of an ecclesiastical act; but the act, and especially the faith associated with the act, may mark stages of progress in the grace bestowed. The fact that in spite of ourselves and our shameful negligences, we seem to be made for God and for belief in the spiritual, and that religion persists in its hold upon us, notwithstanding the spells of practical irreligion in our lives, is to be explained by the truth that grace wrought within us through stages of half-developed consciousness, the very recollection of which has passed away. The largest possession of the saints in heaven is bound by continuous links to the grace infused on earth into the heart of a little child. If we are faithful and diligent in the use of our first endowments, there will be perpetual growth in grace, and the stinted bestowment will be exchanged for the lavish, the inferior for the sublime, the partial for the perfect and all-inclusive. The holy Saviour who, from the days of our helpless infancy onwards, puts into us some inclination towards good, says, "Come back

again and yet again to My feet, for at each return I will augment the gift." "He giveth more grace," and the increase is proportionate to our use of the first instalments. When we have no sense of these enlarging supplies, is it not that the earlier grace has been wasted through neglect?

When the crisis of conversion arrives *the grace of infancy passes from an unconscious to a conscious possession.* The sense of sin becomes keen, because the grace which has long nurtured the moral sense now so invigorates and intensifies it, that its judgments prevail against the secret passions and complacencies of the fleshly nature. And that grace in the conscience broadens out and deepens into holy contrition, which is also a Divine gift and a condition of saving faith as well as an earnest of further spiritual enrichment. A faith that seeks to run before repentance will always be void, leaving the soul in bitterness and condemnation, inasmuch as it ignores this progressive law. The grace of an assured and peace-creating faith, is given to complete and crown the lower grace of contrition. And when we put to the proof the grace we possess by obeying God's commandments, our love to God is enlarged and strengthened by the act. Sentiment passes into a vertebrate principle, and we stand erect on the high places of the Christian life. It is useless trying to climb the loftier sections of the ladder if the rungs which should take us to the first alighting-place be wanting. He whose soul is closed to penitential shame and abasement, has sinned away the grace of childhood. He who cannot exercise a soul-delivering faith in the covenant of love, has despised the gift of repentance bestowed by the exalted Prince. He who finds himself unable to walk in blameless and obe-

dient love has slighted or let slip the grace through which he once had access into the holy place and caught gleams of God's reconciled face. He to whom service is an insipid serfdom, has forfeited the grace which assured him of his place in God's family, and whilst that is wanting, cannot do God's will joyfully. He has missed the stepping-stone, and his aimless wanderings will only carry him on into pain and vexation. God's inward gifts are arranged in an ascending series. "To him that hath shall be given." That which has been lost by misuse may be recovered, but the clew must be found at the beginning, and not midway in the series. The order and arrangement of the qualities portrayed in the beatitudes accentuates this thought. Whilst those virtues of the Christian life exist side by side we may yet trace something like a genealogical relationship between them. "Poverty of spirit" opens the series, for to be chastened in temper and sensible of one's own defect is the earliest step to the new spiritual consciousness. Poverty of spirit with its essential benediction gives place to penitential mourning, which is a more positive quality than the mere sense of want. Again, the lower grace is replaced by the higher, and the penitential grief, changed into joy, passes thenceforth into Christ-like meekness and gentleness. And the soul, brought back to gladness and a new life, becomes eager in the pursuit of righteousness and is satisfied. And righteousness proceeds to link itself with mercy; and at last there is the pureness of heart before God which fits to see His face, and the peaceable and patient temper before men which gains the highest rewards of the kingdom. At each succeeding stage the lower is

exchanged for a higher grace, and he who would have his life enriched by these things must start at the beginning. "Grace for grace."

And service itself falls within the scope of this principle which rules in Christ's kingdom—"grace for grace." When high and honourable ministries are entrusted to us, we are not thereby introduced into an economy of works as distinguished from grace. How prone we are to forget that! If we have been stedfast, zealous, self-renouncing, we are tempted to think that the favour is on our side and that Jesus Christ and His Church are our debtors. That temptation is stamped with ecclesiastical approval by those who teach that the saint who endures unappointed pain, or enters upon labours not vital to his own salvation, has a credit balance of virtue which may be placed to the account of others. But it is not wise or Scriptural to look at the subject in that way. Not only is work unpretending as the cup of cold water recompensed beyond its intrinsic deserts, but the very doing of the work implies the previous bestowment of a gift from Christ in which it took its rise. Divine impulses have stirred us. Our grandest things are done by inspirations for which we can claim no credit. We have simply used a grace for ministry that has been lavished upon us, and have not entered upon some great field of opportunity, where merit may be made. This doctrine of grace revolutionised Paul's conception of Christian duty. The service he asks of believers at Rome had its roots in God's secret benefactions to their spirits, and not in indigenous excellencies of disposition. "Having gifts differing according *to the grace that was given unto us*, whether prophecy let us prophesy

according to the proportion of our faith;" and ministry, teaching, exhortation, giving, all fall within the same rule. In spite of the leaven of legalism which clung so tenaciously to Simon Peter, he also presents precisely the same thought. "According as each *hath received a gift* ministering it among yourselves as good stewards of the manifold grace of God;" and then he goes on to specify giving, speaking, ministering, and affirms that in each case that which is given, taught, or ministered is of God, and that the human instrument is nothing. We bestow of that which has been freely bestowed upon us. We do not call into existence the endowments which are at the root of acceptable service any more than the Channel squadron creates the wealth of our island home. It simply guards. The man whose life is richest in service does nothing of himself, for God's grace is the all-availing factor of potency in his activities. We cannot overstep the frontiers of that kingdom in which God deals with us giftwise. And the grace which inspires for lowlier forms of service makes ready for the more majestic and prince-like. Well-used talents are followed by wide-ranging dominions. The little gives place to much, and the much to a sum that outstrips our dreams. It was given to early believers not only to believe in Christ, but to suffer for His sake, and certain apostles thought that the nobler gift. "Grace for grace."

And *the highest possibilities of sanctity* put before us in the present life rest upon this principle of grace for grace. Neither in this world nor in that which is to come shall we reach a point at which this cumulative principle has no further room to act. The holiest

being of our race is the one most deeply indebted to God, and least capable of claiming any credit whatever for his own attainment. The grace that pardons and renews is not an interlude in our history, after which we are free to revert to legalism and its self-flattering hopes. When grace once comes into our lives it comes not only to stay but to grow into ever-widening power. Whatever the height of our attainment in holiness, there will be little risk of pride if we keep in mind the basis upon which that attainment rests, for holiness is God's free gift upon a larger scale, and the growing magnitude of the gift leaves less room than ever for boasting. The earlier makes ready for the later grace of unspeakable richness. A river of which we have all heard flows for a thousand miles without receiving a single tributary. The life-history of a Christian is not like that. It should ever be receiving fresh, new accessions to its volume from those springs which are in God. The first grace that comes into our lives is all but lost in the magnificence of the later gains. With the lapse of the centuries finer material is made to replace the coarse in the fabric of our civilisation. The grass and palm-leaf with which man built his first hut, are followed by sun-dried mud and by sandstone and porphyry and marble. The flint gives place to bronze, the bronze to iron, the iron to silver and gold ; and the noble material could only come in exchange for those lowly beginnings. And into the structure of our experience God is ever putting better material, enriching us, when we are receptive, with gifts which outshine those that preceded. The light and joy in a child's religion are followed by the enduring heroism and self-suppression

of the disciplined man, and these by the sweetness and contentment, the serenity and cloudless glow of the saint ripe for heaven. The grace which gives rest to the weary and heavy laden is followed by the grace which makes meek and lowly with a Christ-like loveliness, and so establishes the soul with a yet more sacred rest. To copy Christ implies a more munificent enduement from on high than for a sin-crushed soul to lay its burden at Christ's feet. The supreme rest of the faith which is perfected through obedience is not less a gift than that which rewards the first act of faith. When we are instructed from Christ's wisdom, justified by His righteousness, sanctified by participation in His life, redeemed for ever through His dominion over all things in heaven and earth, we are dealt with giftwise and receive of Christ's fulness. We can no more escape the operation of this principle of grace than we can think ourselves beyond the last frontier of space. Throughout the far-off ages we shall be debtors to grace in a ratio of amazing increase. The law of our endless development may be described on its human side as "from faith to faith," and on its Divine side as "grace for grace," and "faith" and "grace" are correspondent terms. "Faith" denotes man looking up in trust to God, and "grace" denotes God looking down in Christ with infinite kindness and favour upon man.

And heaven itself is the gift of a grace surpassing in its magnitude all preceding knowledge and experience. "I go to prepare a place for you." No cosmic meaning must be attached to that valedictory message, just as though He who made the world were engaged through the long centuries of His Mediatorial reign in fashioning some orb which should eclipse the rest.

That may or may not be true, but He goes as a minister of grace to His mighty throne, and it is through the fulfilment of that benign vocation that He is making ready the eternal home which is to shelter His followers. "The New Jerusalem comes down from God out of heaven," the sign of the Saviour's accomplished work in heaven, for it has been built by Divine love beyond the stars and not fashioned on earth by human hands. When its beauty and preciousness are described, one of the lessons conveyed is, that it cannot be bought by human toil or merited by human service. As well might a crossing-sweeper expect to buy Balmoral and Windsor out of his earnings, as that the meekest martyr or the most daring apostle should obtain such an inheritance, as a tribute to his pain and toil. Crowns and mansions and thrones of power are impossible of attainment for us in the eternal kingdom, unless as gifts. The songs of the redeemed are songs of grace, without a solitary strain in praise of human strength and exploit. And the transition from the earthly to the heavenly state, does but mark the exchange of the first grace that cleanses from sin, for the fuller grace that leads forth into nobler pathways of movement and crowns with deathless victory. "Grace for grace."

It is possible for us to receive in vain a grace fraught with such boundless promise, and it is received in vain where there is no progress, no enlargement, no deepening sense of indebtedness to the Divine favour. At what stage do we find ourselves? Have we higher degrees of grace than those given to us in the days of our infancy? How must we attain a firmer grasp and a more conscious possession of that inward mystic principle described as grace? We tell

a man to believe, and assert that he cannot know the blessedness of the Divine favour till he does believe, yet at the same time we remind him that faith is a gift of God. And when he becomes perplexed, and complains that he cannot feel God is helping his penitence or inspiring his faith, we urge him to believe as an act of will. If the millstone of inevitable doubt seems to weigh him down, he must remember it is a mandate to believe, and, feeling or no feeling, must just cast himself upon the Divine word. Perhaps that is the only counsel we can give ; but some seekers after God deprive themselves of this consciousness of grace because they are on the watch for outward signs, convulsive transitions, a kingdom coming with observation, just as slow-witted lads on board ship are sometimes persuaded to look out for a geographical sign-post when they are about to cross the equator. These dividing lines are sometimes subtler than thought itself, and cannot be made perceptible to the direct senses. And it is thus as we pass from stage to stage of grace. "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof but canst not tell whence it cometh and whither it goeth." See that you do not miss the prospering wind. If the stirring in the air is but faint, keep a full-spread sail and head to the sunrise, and whether you get your hand on the secret dividing line or not, you will soon find yourselves in summer zones and amidst scenes of holy enchantment. But before all things else be lowly in mind. Pride is a sinister force often thwarting those counsels of the Divine love which seek to act in us and through us upon the world. " God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble."

XVI

RESPONSIVE KNOWLEDGE

"Ye have known God, or rather are known of God."—GAL. iv. 9.

IN these words the apostle argues that for men who have been brought out of the gross darkness of heathenism into clear, direct, and saving intimacy with God, it is unseemly to turn back and take refuge in a religion of ritual. The Galatians are reminded of the fact that they have been received to the grace of the Divine friendship, and that a reversion to the religion of the letter, excusable perhaps in a less privileged people, is blameworthy in those who have attainments of solid value to look back upon. Children of God, sealed by His Spirit and emboldened by superhuman inspirations, enjoy companionship with the Most High; and in all genuine companionship there is knowledge on both sides. Forgiveness is the foundation of a true theology for the man who has experience of its blessedness, and this partial apostasy to a religion of outward form befitting only rude, half-taught, unprivileged souls, was a humiliating anomaly in those who had stood before God's face and caught true accents of His voice.

It would exhibit a curious falling away from the

present-day standards of intellectual life, if we were to go into the studio of the artist and find him taking as his models the scrawls of a barbarian ignorant of the first principles of perspective. Passing thence on to the deck of an ironclad, we learn that costly chronometers have been dropped into the sea, and rude hour-glasses and water-clocks installed to do their work. We next visit the fortifications that guard the approaches to our great seaports, and observe that Maxim guns have been broken up for old iron and their places filled by bows and arrows, catapults and chain armour. And finally in the Laboratory of the Royal Institution we see that all scientific instruments and appliances have been set aside and the shelves filled with astrological charts, charms, amulets, the stock-in-trade of the fortune-teller—things that may befit a joss-house or a gipsy tent, but are altogether incongruous in a place famous as the home of exact science. We should ask, Is it in the twelfth or the thirteenth century we are living? Such a reversion would be quite incredible. And yet our astonishment and dismay would not be greater than was that of the apostle as he looked upon threatening changes in the thought and practice of these Galatian Churches. It was a step backward into ignorance and superstition that made him hot with righteous wrath.

Paul did not wonder at the ritualism of his own early contemporaries, whose knowledge of sacred realities was traditional, and who had not got beyond the rude object-lesson which vaguely foreshadowed the mystery of communion with God. The minds of those men, alas! had never been uplifted and illumined with the sense of personal adoption

into God's family. But he did wonder at those who had received the Spirit, and whose knowledge of God was in no sense second-hand, taking up with Jewish rites, or indeed with any rites at all, other than those simple observances enjoined by Jesus Christ Himself for the strengthening of faith.

The apostle seems to imply that the intimacy with God which they had hitherto enjoyed makes further rites and ceremonies cumbrous and hurtful surplusage. To keep days and months, seasons and years, brought suspicion upon the sufficiency of the faith by which they had been justified, and the genuineness of their communion with God. The ruler of a state who has to divide his time into parsimonious fractions, and cannot be accessible at all hours to the people whose rights he holds in his keeping, must surround himself with a fence of etiquette and appoint court days when his subjects can have the audience they seek. The person upon whose time there are claims of more or less importance must needs fix special dates on which visitors may call without risk of disappointment. But in the freedom of the family life there are no dates rigidly labelled for the interchange of amenities, nor, indeed, in the more intimate circles of comradeship. A mother is always at home to dutiful children who require her counsel and sympathy, and the codes which guard the fireside against the intrusion of strangers give way when the knock of a bosom-friend is heard at the door. Rituals, restrictions, days duly marked in a calendar, are intended to minimise rather than inconveniently multiply opportunities of communication, and the austere etiquette adopted by society is chiefly for those who are strangers and aliens. It is a queer conception of

God, which assumes that on the new moon or the solemn feast-day, He has a special "At Home" for His worshippers, and that access to His presence is fenced in by an inflexible sumptuary code. God is always within the call of His own children, and prescribed periods, stiffened rituals, hide-bound restrictions are out of keeping with the privileged estate of those in whom the true knowledge of God has dawned. And such were these Galatian converts. Why should a man who both knows God and is known of God, cramp and fetter himself by miserable conditions which seem to put God away from human life or imply that his contact with it is grudging and intermittent? Knowledge brings freedom. Why should those who have the close relations with God peculiar to the inner family life, put themselves back into the position of strangers and slaves?

It is not of theoretical or speculative, but of heart knowledge that the apostle is here speaking—the appreciation which is experimental in its basis, and grows up out of direct dealings with God. The spirit of adoption had enshrined itself within these believers, discovering to them with ever-growing clearness in the majestic Ruler of all things a gracious and reconciled Father. It is the special knowledge of which Jesus speaks when He says, "I know My sheep and am known of Mine."

There is a sense in which we are all agnostics, by nature at least. So Paul hinted to the puffed-up, dogmatic sciolists of his day, who claimed to know God by the methods of the schools. "If any man thinketh that he knoweth anything, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know. But if any man love God, the same is known of God." Grace ends

our agnosticism, and from the time it prevails within us we begin to know. There can be no love in absolute ignorance, or in those guesses at God's natural attributes which we are half compelled to make as we contemplate His handiwork. Our knowledge is partial. It comes to us in stray gleams, gleams reflected from that which is true and abiding, and not hallucinations ; but we cannot grasp all the facts of the Divine Being, character, and operation, and give to each its proper place in a consistent whole.

There is a sense in which the young child can scarcely be said to know his father, and there is yet another sense in which he knows him more truly and inwardly than any one else. From one standpoint the physiologist knows him better. The child cannot tell how many bones and sinews are adjusted together in the father's hand, how many muscles direct the mechanism of the eye, what portions of the brain are engaged in the acts of turning, walking, thinking. From another standpoint twenty men in the city have better knowledge of him than the child. What is he worth? Are his future fortunes full of promise? What are his commitments on the exchange or the property mart? The bank manager can answer that question with a fair degree of shrewdness. From yet another standpoint his clerks are wiser than the child. What are the complex questions which occupy his brain in the office or the counting-house? Perhaps he is engaged in subtle scientific researches which can only be made intelligible to experts, and which would entirely baffle the comprehension of a half-grown lad. In not a few particulars outsiders may understand him and

his ways more correctly than the children of the home. But all that is deepest and most sacred in his personality is best grasped by those who cluster about his fireside. As sure as morning and evening come in their appointed rounds, he is the embodiment of living essential love, benign sympathy, unfailing gentleness and bounty, and few shadows come where he tarries. By the delicate science of the fireside they have touched and proved him in the innermost sanctuary of his character; and that is the solid, stedfast, absolute fact on which they can count to the end of their days. In the little sphere of their immediate life they are more confident, and rightly so, than the wiseacres of the club or the exchange, who eye him from afar and draw their gossiping conclusions from an induction of uncertain commercial fact mixed with much imagination. His love may not go far afield in its exercise, or it may, but as far as his own children are concerned the fact is truer than all outside judgments put together.

And so it is with our knowledge of God. The metaphysician may outstrip us in speculations about God's being, attributes, and government, and there are confessedly many things in the Divine methods that we have scarcely begun to know. In searching for final causes in Nature we are not much better than the ox which, having turned a mill for twenty years, is suddenly confronted with the mystery of an autocar, and sets himself to explore the secret of its locomotion. God's ways in the whirl of this chaotic planet are often past finding out. For the present, some secrets we want to explore are insoluble. But up to this point we are sure, and nothing can dispossess us of our convictions. We know God, espe-

cially the sympathy of his Fatherhood, and that is the most vital part of the problem.

It is a sufficient apology for that doctrine of grace upon which every true Church must be founded, that it brings those who receive it to the knowledge of God. If it succeed in this we have no need to dilute our beliefs or vary our first methods of life and discipline, for that is the goal of all learning and aspiration. Where the first gospel has achieved this, an amended gospel with Jewish annotations and interleavings is an impertinence. To reveal God to our consciousness, and to pervade our natures with His ineffable light, is the essential aim of religion and its functions and ministries. If faith indeed unveils the Eternal, and continues to unveil Him, let us cling to our vantage-ground, and never turn aside to plausible novelties. The opening of the celestial gates at the dissolution of the flesh will not do more than faith in its degree is doing even now. The rest of that Sabbath to which no night comes, will be but a deepening of the inward rest of faith. The keeping of days and seasons, archaic rites, a swarm of vexatious bylaws hatched by the rabbis is a sign of a meagre and an ill-conditioned faith, and will be but a poor reparation of that capital defect. The faith is vagrant, uncentred, and unsatisfying, which forsooth must be eked out by a ritual congenial to the temper of self-righteousness. The thought and song and service of heaven are appointed to enlarge the soul's view of God, and faith is destroying veils and uplifting horizons even now, and whatever belittles the power of faith or divides its functions, contracts the spiritual firmament, and filches from us that knowledge of God which is eternal life.

The apostle here brings two thoughts into comparison with each other. "We know God; and we are known of God." The second truth is greater and more significant than the first, and forms a yet stronger argument against any departure from the teaching of the past.

The transition of these Galatians from agnosticism to sure discernment, was conjoined to *a significant change in God's thought concerning them.* They had come into God's more intimate knowledge and survey. God, of course, knows all men and everything about them, but till this crucial change takes place He does not fix upon them the same intense regard. From many He would fain withdraw His thought, if it were possible. There is so little in them to enlist His approval and engage His love, that He would be quite content for them to be merged in the dim, indistinguishable crowd. The owner of a library numbering thousands of volumes, may be more or less familiar with every volume on the shelves which fill the many rooms of his house. But there are books of invigorating interest and special illumination which he keeps within constant reach of his hand, and he knows them in a sense in which he does not know dictionaries and books of reference, and the heaps of less fascinating volumes which are under his care. In every library there are top-shelf books. The art collector may have scores or even hundreds of paintings in his house, and may know the history and value of each canvas, but he likes to put his favourite paintings in his living room, so that he may have them under daily observation and feast on their qualities at will. Every detail stands out with a graphic power wanting in the other pictures which

are hung in less frequented parts of the house, or possibly packed away in a store-room. So whilst God knows everything about each and every man who moves upon the face of the earth, and keeps an unerring inventory of his thoughts and characteristic ways, yet when a man passes from darkness into light there is a sense in which he becomes a peculiar object of God's knowledge. God always keeps such a man within His nearer horizon. "The Lord knoweth them that are His," is a foundation article of the Christian faith. Said God to Moses, "Thou hast found grace in My sight, and I know thee by name." The leal-hearted and believing servant is singled out for special observation and regard, and as in the case of Moses, Samuel, Elijah, a tender comradeship is signified in the use of the personal name. He becomes more than the mere member of a species or a drop in the multitudinous sea. The fact that God should know us and call us by name, makes it impossible that we should continue in entire ignorance of God. Whilst it is a fact, and a fact which involves salvation, that we "know God," it is a yet grander and more suggestive fact that "we are known of God."

To the truth that we are known of God Paul gives the foremost place, because *it fits in with his doctrines of grace*. If we assume that we have discovered God rather than that God has sought us out for communion with Himself, our theology, however orthodox in the abstract, becomes a species of academic Pharisaism. The possession of this, as of other elements of knowledge, may tempt us to pride, and we must cultivate humility by remembering that all intelligent religion begins in the sense we have that the kind God knows us and keeps our welfare in His

thought. We sometimes hear patrons of art, music, or literature boasting that they discovered an obscure genius and brought him into notice—no one had the sagacity to see his great promise before they lighted upon it. They would like to carry about in their train, and exhibit as a trophy of their discernment, a man who is vastly greater than themselves. "I brought him into favour, and was the first to see his uncommon gifts; his immediate companions were too obtuse to recognise his capabilities. If I had not taken him up, the chances are that he would still have been at the plough-tail, in the mill, or the coal-mine." That vainglorious temper is current in every form of heathenism, and sometimes perchance creeps into our religion. The idolater claims that he or some one of his fellow-citizens or forefathers first recognised the superhuman rank of the deity before which he bows, and secured for him patent-rights of worship from the imperial throne. It is the faith of the worshipper which makes the deity, and his existence or non-existence is an accident scarcely worth arguing about. He exists at least in the mind of the worshipper, and it is impossible to say how far the occult forces of the worshipper's personality may reach. Enter a heathen temple and you will hear there the rattle of crackers, the firing of guns, the beating of gongs and bells. The attention of the god must be arrested, and a very noisy process it often is. The approachment begins with man, and it is not judged likely that the spirit hovering near the image knows very much about the petitioner. Many besides those in heathenism, or just emerging from it, are in danger of forgetting the fact that our knowledge of God is an effect following upon an eternal

cause—God's knowledge of us. The heathen man reverses the order, putting the cause in man and the effect in God. The self-boasting into which the Galatians were being led through the practice of an effete ritual, is excluded by the principle that God's thought of us is the starting-point for all our thoughts of God. Our discovery of the Eternal is a response to the wise and tender solicitude concerning us which throbs in His mighty heart. A child's trustful glance at the father, and his instinctive perception of the sterling qualities in his father's personality, are begotten by the fact that the father has first known the child and cast soul-awakening glances on him, in the days of dim, flickering consciousness and slow-dawning knowledge. It is God's knowledge of us which gives worth, force, validity to our knowledge of God. If some neighbour is watching our work, manner of life, habitual character with intelligent interest and approving sympathy, that fact will create response on our part and the knowledge will soon become mutual. Our knowledge of God is a faint reflection, a slender rill from the deep fountain of God's knowledge of us. We may trust it, for it cannot betray us. Some things in our speculative theology we may have to modify or replace, but there is no room for distrust at this point. This is the truth that is with us and in us, and shall be for ever. Eternal life has its beginnings here.

That God should know us is the greater of the two truths with which the apostle is dealing, because that fact gives the key to the most vital question which can engage the finite mind—*the character of God.* That we should want to know something about God may be due to intellectual curiosity, or to an instinct

which compels us to seek into the reason of things. It is our interest, moreover, to find out something concerning the character of the great Ruler who is over us, so that if possible we may keep in harmony with His requirements. It does not necessarily mean much when one of humble degree gleans information about one of loftier estate, and to read a society journal is no special certificate of character. But the case admits of a different interpretation when one of commanding position and influence thinks it worth while to know by face and name and detailed history the poor, the helpless, the forlorn, and possibly the blameworthy. That He who dwells in the high and holy place and sways a sceptre of infinite dominion, should fix His thought upon us and consent to know us, indicates a kindness the marvel of which is overwhelming.

A worthy but unpretending man stepped up to a millionaire who had been the lion of several London seasons, and reminded him that thirty years before they had worked together in a fitting-shop in the north of England. The nitrate king received the advance with much civility, and heartily shook hands with his old comrade. For the humbler man to claim acquaintance with his exalted contemporary implied of course a touch of robust manliness, a sociable temper and pride in the success of his early workmate. But if the case had been reversed, and the recognition had come from the millionaire, it would have implied a great deal more—freedom from pride, generous sympathy, unforgetting fidelity to the associations of the past. That God should know us with such fulness of discrimination, such exquisite sense of our need, such noble appreciation of our every struggle to please Him, is a fact that

speaks worlds to us about the innermost heart of God and the richness of its love.

Whilst waiting in the drawing-room of some middle-class home you cast your eye over the table and see there the "Life of the Prince Consort," "Leaves from the Journal in the Highlands," "The Stately Homes of England," with its pictures and bits of gossip about their titled owners. You say at once, These worthy people have a kindly interest in the doings of the royal family, like to know something about our aristocracy, and take pleasure in engravings of Windsor, Eton Hall, Welbeck Abbey, Chatsworth and Blenheim. But the knowledge of great people represented by these books does not necessarily prove that the people in this home have very heroic virtues. If, however, you were to pass through the libraries of any of these stately homes and were to see open upon the table, Charles Booth's "Statistics of London Poverty," "Darkest England and the Way Out," Report of Commission on the Housing of the Poor, the knowledge represented by such volumes would give a deep insight into character. You would say, This Prince or that Duke is a man of humane instincts, and has the passion for betterment: he wants to find out something about the condition of the poor and support some wise plan to help them. That incident would be in itself a revelation of character, and of the best qualities of character. It does not mean much when the commoner wants to pick up one or two items of knowledge about the throne, but when the throne sets itself to learn something about the meanest and most forlorn commoner, that is to the honour of the throne and to the eternal credit of the one who fills it. That we should be known of

God is in itself a pledge of the love which passeth knowledge.

The apostle puts this fact—that God knows us—into the emphatic place, because it is *the basis of our fellowship with the Eternal.* It is a much more important thing that God should admit me and my interests into His thought, than that I should have some glimmering apprehension of God. Most Londoners can recognise every member of the reigning house, but it is impossible for our princes, with all their gifts for remembering names and faces, to recognise every inhabitant of the cold, cruel, mammoth Metropolis. The knowledge a poor crippled shoeblack outside a railway station may have of the heir-apparent, cannot possibly become the basis for converse with that distinguished person. But if the heir-apparent interests himself to find out the name and abiding-place and past pitiful struggle of the poor shoeblack, it may possibly become the basis for kindly and helpful converse between the two. Whilst some knowledge of God is necessary to our fellowship with His Spirit, such knowledge can never achieve that fellowship. Communion is possible because God knows us. Much as we may have learned about God, we should be the forgotten pariahs of the universe unless God knew all about us and thought upon our welfare. If we are not face to face with a conscious, an intelligent, an inexhaustible altruism we are the victims of an unhappy fate indeed. It is of graver import to my destiny that God should know me closely and sympathetically, than that I should know God and find my reason and understanding touched with a few gleams of His presence.

Communion with God is sometimes compared to the converse of mind with mind in literature, but the analogy is imperfect, for such converse is not reciprocal. In the solitudes of foreign travel, in the peril and isolation of fanatical cities, in the bleak, dumb infinitudes of the untrodden prairie, the lonely Englishman may cultivate the masters of our incomparable literature, Chaucer, Shakespeare, Milton, Keats, Shelley, and find much delight as he makes their beauties his own. But he will be stung by the heart-ache of exile all the time, for these great singers are dumb to his personal longing, and he can only think of the sympathy they might have felt. It is scarcely likely that any of these great souls know him or trouble about his forlornness. There can be no true communion between a student and a dead master, for the student is crying out for sympathy with a little human caloric in it, living, personal, consciously reciprocated relationship; and moods come to him when he would rather have a man Friday to lisp a few syllables of homage, or even a dog to lick his hand, than the host of Elizabethan, Queen Anne, and Victorian writers rolled into one. We want to be known by God as well as to know Him, and it would be no gain to us to discover a wonderful God, unwilling to walk with us, to enter into converse with our life, or to think of us more than of the beasts that perish. There are times when we feel it is immeasurably better that God should have taken us into His knowledge than that we should be able to possess ourselves of all the thoughts which have become the heritage of the seraph, who has mused before the throne of God from the birth of the sun and onward. If we grasp the truth

that we are known of God, in the doctrines into which that thought will unfold by its own inherent vitality, we have a theology that will save us and create mighty heavens of song and splendour in our souls.

This truth is paramount in its interest because God's knowledge of us is *the great guiding and dominating force in our history.* It is according to His perfect appreciation of our need that He ministers to us, and not according to our groping apprehension of the mysteries of His being and attributes. We do not earn His largesses of light and peace through our slow attainments in Divine wisdom, for it is only after we have had large experience of His help that we become fruitful in knowledge. His studious care for us is the cause of everything that is right and satisfying in our lives, and our grateful sense of His lovingkindness is an effect following at a wide interval. His knowledge is intertwined with the root of every promise put before us, and of that life of filial fellowship and blessedness into which the promise fructifies. Many of our poor promises would not be made if we knew beforehand all that their fulfilment was to involve, and the real characters of those on whose behalf we pledged our word. God's promises presuppose His all-comprehending knowledge—knowledge of our demerit, knowledge of our pitiable needs, of our temptation, of our distress and pain, and knowledge also of our hidden capabilities for grateful service and responsive love. Let us leave ourselves in the saving and ruling hand of Him who thus knows us. We may have a scant knowledge of God—knowledge that will scarcely allow us to

believe He is other than a stranger to us. The heart with its meagre and sickly light and its cramped range of discernment may nurse remorse and self-reproach, mistaking the condemnation that is passing out of our lives for fresh-gathering wrath; while all the time the Infinite Great Heart who is at the helm of the universe has absolved us. There is no failure or disqualification of which His Covenant has not already taken account. He sees the range of our aspirations as well as the unsounded depths of our humiliation and repeated defeats, and yet He keeps us in His knowledge and deals with us by a sympathy and close-nestling pitifulness that surpass our most exalted estimate of His tenderness. We are known of God, and that perfectly. Such is the great truth which should absorb into itself the lesser truth. That word should hearten us in our strife to believe and keep us from the gloom and feverish mistrust which arise when the good news is forgotten. God has given the Spirit to be an inward witness of His gracious and intimate knowledge of us. He has come to know us in Christ as sons, and He is unveiling His Fatherhood to our souls, and out of this knowledge building up in our natures the consciousness of an enduring filial relationship. Let this content us. Let us trustfully hail within our hearts the Spirit of adoption and flee from all that hides God from us as we should flee from the malarious cloud creeping up from the marshes which brings death in its sombre wings.

XVII

THE PLEDGES AND OBLIGATIONS OF THE CREATOR

"A faithful Creator."—1 PET. iv. 19.

EVERY influential form of religion starts in a doctrine of creation. Apart from that, the obligation of the worshipper to his god and of the god to His worshipper, rests upon a foundation of froth and quicksand. The historian of the chosen family and its fortunes shows himself to be a man of deep and inspired insight, in prefixing to his narratives a story of genesis—a story which, whatever its precise scientific value, traces back with unfaltering emphasis the existing universe of matter and mind to the will and word of one Supreme God. The technical exactness of some of the biological details will become of secondary interest to us, when we apprehend aright the dominating motive of the grand creation story.

If we are not the products of God's creative power, the sense of obligation to His supreme moral sovereignty will always seem ill-based, and obedience to His authority an arbitrary idea. We shall be tempted to feel as indifferent to His decrees as to the bylaws of a Sultan of Morocco or the

edicts of the Grand Llama of Thibet. No authority over us other than that of a Creator can be absolute, unlimited, inherent in the nature of things.

And this doctrine of a creation is just as necessary to the beginnings of our faith in God as to our sense of moral obligation. If God be not our Creator what indefeasible title and claim can we have to His succour, defence, and redeeming ministrations? Some races believe in the eternity of matter who have at the same time a copiously furnished Pantheon; but the gods are pitiless, fickle, unpledged and more or less proud and icy-souled. And this is inevitably so, for unless the god is a mere ancestor, in which case he is no god but the ghost of a departed forefather, there is no organic tie between God and worshipper. Religion, consisting as it does of two complementary halves—precept which defines and regulates the inward and outward acts due from the worshipper; and loving confidence towards God, quickened by the thought that God is under some kind of pledge and obligation to succour the people He has brought into being—religion will wither root and branch if we once surrender the doctrine of creation out of which it arises.

The form taken by those Divine acts which originated life, is a problem of second-rate interest and concern to us. The late Charles Darwin declares in one of his books, that the question of the existence of a God is not affected one way or the other by the scientific doctrine to which his investigations had led. It is sometimes argued that creation by the methods of a slow evolution, seems to cast an unworthy shadow over the skill and power of the Almighty. It puts Him too much on the same level with the craftsman,

who rises to the more ingenious feats of his calling by dull, weary, protracted apprenticeship and through struggle against partial failure and frustration. It cannot surely be that at the outset God created what was crude, coarse, and formless, and then, little by little, through the processes of the tardy centuries, raised it into a long-deferred perfection. Does the Infinite need to travel to His far-off goals by miserable ant strides? But the argument is obviously just as good against a six days' creation, the first stage of which was marred by darkness and chaos, as against a creation extending through six millions of years.

It is held that creation by processes of slow and struggling development compels us to think of the Divine attributes as acting in Nature under inexplicable restraints and limitations, and that we can find no other clew than this to the expenditure of vast epochs of time. But we are not shut up to a solitary theory upon this mysterious and far-reaching subject. If God is to make the universe a school of object-lessons setting forth truths concerning Himself, and a temple of communion with finite minds, He must assume in His creative acts many of the conditions under which finite intelligence works. For instance, by adopting patient and unhasting methods of operation, God may be teaching us what high and blessed powers He lavishes upon all that comes from His hand, the incalculable value He attaches to His own workmanship, and the significant place it may fill in the great epochs of the future. We prize more highly Cologne Cathedral, the perfecting of which has occupied the larger half of a millennium, than an Exhibition building, however vast, which is run up in a few months. For the present, at least, it may be

we can only measure the worth of work by the scale of time.

The photographer stocks his portfolios and the drawers of his cabinet with pictures that have been instantaneously taken and are proportionably cheap. The work is done by the click of mechanism, and no serious draft is made upon his intellectual life. He has not mused himself into thoughtful and fervent converse with the scenes projected upon his camera, and the views which he can multiply to any extent from his negatives, have little value in his own estimation or that of the public to whom they will be offered. To buy an entire book of them will not cost a king's ransom. On the other hand, an artist will give months to work up with successive touches of inimitable delicacy, some masterpiece, for the possession of which nations will compete. Through long and careful observation he grows into all-absorbing sympathy with his subject, and his powers are so delightfully stimulated during the performance of his task that he will reach its conclusions with something akin to regret. You know he will prize the work to which he has given long months of toil, and put a much higher price upon it than the photographer puts upon his wares. His life and love went out into the subject, and it will always be a memento of days when his faculties were raised to a happy tension that made life worth living. The work that has cost long thought and labour and manipulation will not be lightly esteemed. The old idea of creation made the great mystery instantaneous as a shot with the kodak. The new scientific idea, not perhaps mathematically proved, is that it is a process of tardy and interminable evolution. But if

it should be that God has been adding touch after touch to the universe, and working it up into loftier beauty and more cunning adjustment and adaptation for millions of years, does this not seem to say, God puts Himself into patient and sympathetic relations with the things He has been handling; that He prizes His own workmanship and thinks no epochs too long for its consummation; and that He cannot but attach incalculable value to that which He has made at such a stupendous outlay? Such "a faithful Creator" can never prove Himself a slack-handed guardian of His own work. Into His care we may confidently commit in every time of trouble and bewilderment the keeping of both body and soul.

Why does the fact that we are God's handiwork constitute some kind of guarantee for His fidelity to us? What are the bonds which unite a Creator to the realms He has brought out of nothing by His fiat?

The work of a true creator *represents his own idea*, and he is committed thereby to the loving and patient guardianship of it. In imperfectly organised human societies, not a little work is done under the stress of compulsion, rather than because the worker loves it. A man is driven to the uncongenial tasks of his daily life by the pressure of want, direct or more remote as the case may be, and he spends himself not because he has ideas which are restless for expression and embodiment, but to keep the wolf from the door. Seen or unseen, the taskmaster always hovers hard by and the pressure is seldom relaxed. And when the work exacted by such necessities is done, he who wrought upon it does not care where it goes or to what use it is put, so that he realises fair market

value for that which his toil has produced. Perhaps he would be glad to see it perish, so that the new demand caused by its loss may yield bread for to-morrow. His goods have been fabricated as an instrument of exchange or barter only, and not a shred of that which has passed through his hands has received the faintest imprint of his free personality. Everything he does from year's end to year's end is forced from him by a harsh necessity, and he cannot possibly put himself into it. Perhaps he has no ideas of his own and has simply been carrying out other people's ideas. Many of our fellows know full well the bitterness of that slavery. Not the least grievance in modern industrial systems is, that the average toiler is a mere implement for working out the thoughts of those with whom he feels little or no sympathy, and he has neither time nor strength to work out his own. From his standpoint the fabric is intrinsically worthless, because it expresses designs growing up in minds with which he has nothing in common. It is never thus, however, with the man whose powers are exercised in directly creative tasks. He works from love and not from compulsion, and when he has mastered the elementary technique of his craft or profession, his masterpieces express just what he wants to be expressed. When the execution is adequate to the design, a man finds mirrored before him those fair dreams which have long been hovering in the secret recesses of his soul. The house a man plans, the institution he devises, the symphony he composes is loved like his own child, while those of his neighbour have not half the charm or value in his eyes. The true creator always loves his own work with stedfast passion. Like one or two of the un-

rivalled artists of our time who have left their pictures to the sure guardianship of the nation rather than sell them at munificent prices to private patrons of art, he who originates that which no one else has thought, or thought in the same way, will make any sacrifice to guard it from loss, and to preserve it for the uses of the coming generations. The mere copyist does not care what becomes of his stock-in-trade when his profits have been made.

God who in the full sense of the word is the one only Creator, and who is slowly achieving His aim through an ever-advancing plan, must remain true to that which is His handiwork. Sky and sea, meadow and woodland, and, above all, the sentient life to which these things are accessories, form the materials with which the great Artist works, and even now begin to reflect His designs and to respond to the thoughts of His wonderful personality. His fondest and most sacred musings are built up into the splendour, the stability, and the fruitfulness of the universe; and with a defence exceeding that of all finite fidelity and tenderness He will guard and overshadow with His wings, and make perfect whatever He has called into being. Whilst we must beware of the perilous Pantheism which makes God identical with those substances and organisms and persons which rose from the depths of space at His will and word, yet may we not venture to say that God puts more of Himself into His work than the most passionate human artificer? and that is an indestructible seal of His faithfulness to us and to those realms within which we move.

The strength of a tie attaching a creator to his work may be further *judged by the amount of time*

spent in laying the foundation lines and building up the many-sided perfection of that to which he has set his mind. It is the privilege of some men to choose their own plans of study, research, or invention, and to concentrate all their forces upon one particular object; it must therefore be obvious that their enterprises acquire increasing value in their own eyes, with every added year of life devoted to them. Workers in precious woods, metals and stones, sometimes spend the bloom of their youth or the vigour of their manhood, upon a superb design of which they have become enamoured. Many of the old monks reckoned their lives wisely laid out, if when the end came they had embellished a single copy of the Gospels or a breviary, with their rare arts of illumination. Under the Japanese feudal system the old nobles kept generations of lacquer artists attached to their families, and these patient and skilful men would put ten, twenty, and even thirty years into the elaboration of one comparatively small piece of lacquer. How precious these gems of craftsmanship must have become to the worker who revelled in his calling after they had been growing into faultless minute finish through long stretches of his lifetime. These rare objects would seem to enshrine and immortalise the gladness stirred by the unresting play of wonderful gifts, and if accident were to overtake that work into which the best of the life had gone, madness must surely overwhelm the artist's brain. An accomplished man who for half a century had bent his powers to one task of passionate love, would choose the grave rather than that misadventure should mar or shatter his work. A tragic fiasco indeed following upon the prophecy of great-

ness and immortality must fatal injury to well-wrought marble, gilded lacquer, or illuminated manuscript prove! Fifty years' rich fruition of blended genius and toil blighted in a single hour! Such work becomes at last precious as life, and to protect it the gifted enthusiast is ready to make any sacrifice.

Is not God's creative work more than that? The uncounted series of His patient creative acts, whilst involving neither strain nor worry on the one hand, must not, on the other hand, be looked upon as the offhand flourish of facile cleverness. He puts into that which He has been building up through ages the fulness of His strength and the patience of His eternal being. If these visible realms with all they contain have been a slow evolution, the fact may be an approximate parable of the truth that God has been planning these things in His counsels before the dawn of time. Upon the work of His fingers He has spent all the glory of His attributes, and it has become to Him little less than a second self. The world enshrines the gladness He has felt in the forth-puttings of His wisdom, benignity, strength; for if it is a delight for us to exercise those faculties which are finite offshoots of Divine attributes, it must be a yet greater delight for God to exercise the infinite originals of which our faculties are reduced copies. God has lavished upon His world the skill, the wonderful patience, the delicate gentleness of successive æons. Can He abandon to mischance that into which so much of Himself has entered? Can He suffer its stupendous issues to miscarry? To allow His handiwork to be thwarted or finally destroyed, would be to accept a bitter and ignoble self-effacement. God has breathed His best and holiest qualities into the frame-

work of life. He has wrought wondrously in the universe and will stand by His own enterprises to the end. To His manifold realms of matter and mind He is held by inviolable bonds, and can never prove untrue to that which His hands have wrought. His acts as a Creator invite our hope, for they are pledges of His saving help and unfailing guardianship.

He who has the true instincts of *a creator will feel himself bound to the future fortunes of His work by inviolable honour*. He would be trifling with his own name if he were to repudiate or abandon that which bears his tool-mark. In every department of life we recognise that workmanship and reputation should be identified with each other. The poet will sometimes buy up every possible copy of the crude and immature rhymings of his youth, for he feels that they are unworthy of his genius and below the name he has attained. Now and again firms of chivalrous honour call in machinery into which some defective quality of metal has been inadvertently put. Manufacturers of porcelain and fine art fabrics relentlessly destroy every piece from loom or furnace which is less than perfect, and would scorn the idea of sending things marred in the making to a second-rate market. Honour is at stake, and the principals will never consent to be judged in any part of the world by what has flaw or blemish in it. Mechanism that halts in its movements and falls short of the guarantee, you take care to send back to the first maker, for the man who has put upon it his sign-manual will never be so lacking in self-respect as to say the thing was ill thought out, loosely put together, or is incurable through the inferiority of the raw material used. His name is at stake, and in

repairing or readjusting the delicate instrument, he will not be half-hearted or do scamped work, if he is like other men. The maker will admit an obligation the repairer in the next street will decline. He has common honesty and stands by that which he has devised and built up. In depreciating what bears his name he would condemn himself. It is the irresponsible tinker and not the original mechanic who tells you to sell your costly purchase for old metal at melting-down price; and if the latter were to give such advice you would call him a knave to his face. The patentee who reserves no interest to himself and accepts no responsibility for the future fortunes of his invention, has not much faith in its usefulness. He is a mere huckster, careless of reputation and lacking the soul of a true creator.

The God who has ever shown Himself jealous for His own name's sake, must respond to the obligations resting upon Him towards His own handiwork. Whatever He may have planned, founded, and wrought into shape, He is implicitly pledged to restore and consummate. Never let us think of Him as though He were some august but irresponsible alien, looking down upon a groaning and distracted universe. That universe is the immediate product of His personality, and for better or for worse He is strangely linked with it. Whatsoever He has begun to do, He believes in and will stand by, in patience and unfaltering hope, till the far-off goals of perfect beatitude come into view. He has given hostages for His own fidelity in the far-stretching series of creative acts, and His name is too stupendous to be trifled with or to be uttered in the same breath as abandoned tasks, frustrated adventures, miserable

defeats. A world in a state of permanent breakdown would imply a bankrupt and a defaulting God. He pledges Himself and His unsearchable treasuries of skill and strength to whatever He has touched in the past. He is no groping and light-hearted experimentalist, no sordid trafficker with His creatures, who can bring Himself to disown or repudiate what He has once undertaken. He would discredit Himself if He were to turn His back on these half-finished and weltering realms of life. He is just as much under bond and obligation to us as we are under bond and obligation to Him, although there is no outside court to enforce the covenant. Our perfecting and blessedness are strangely wedded to His eternal honour. He cannot be other than the faithful Creator into whose hands we may confidently commit ourselves and all the complex interests and relations intertwined with our own.

The creative arts have a history of heroic sacrifice which reminds us again and again of the analogies just pointed out—attachment to an idea that has possessed the imagination, fondness for a task that has grown in interest with every fresh hour spent upon it, and the desire for a great and honourable name. An incident already used by a great religious teacher to illustrate a somewhat different lesson will serve to drive home this special truth. In the Gallery of Industries in Paris a bronze figure is shown of Mercury drawing a thorn out of his foot, and about that work of art there gathers a most pathetic story. A sculptor of genius had long worked unnoticed in a miserable attic, never far from starvation. Into that which was to prove his last work and win him a late immortality, he threw his most vehement love and

skill. A keen frost fell upon Paris on the very night when he had just finished his exquisite modelling in clay. Fearing lest some mischance should come to the wet figure which was to be his masterpiece and capture Paris, he put his own clothes round the figure when he retired to rest. In the course of the night, feeling uneasy about the possible effect of the frost upon the wet clay on which he had toiled, he rose from his couch, took the coverlet from the bed and placed it round his work. When the grey morning broke he was found cold, half-naked, dead upon his wretched couch. More than life itself he had loved that which his genius had conjured into form.

And if a man can thus attach himself to that upon which he lavished care and toil and hope, shall not God cherish yet more tenderly the work upon which He spends incomparably higher powers? Does not His clinging affection for those shapes which have grown sentient with His breath surpass the enthusiasm of the most devoted artist for the mute grace of line achieved by his touch? Will not the greatest of all Creators display towards His handiwork a surpassing tenderness and a more heroic fidelity? Is this human enigma of tears, of laughter, of reason, of sensibility, of warm, palpitating love that has stood forth at His fiat, not quite so much as a feat in clay? Is not the obligation God must feel towards His work, a thousandfold more holy than that of man's genius to the stuff he has kneaded into an impassive symbol? God is the faithful Creator who cannot do other than stand by that which He has called into being.

The appeal to God's creative love is heard again and again in the pages of the Old Testament Scriptures. The unknown sufferer of the twenty-second Psalm,

who is a type of the forsaken Messiah, addresses himself from the depths of his desolation and obstinate despair, to that holy Giver of life who must surely sustain some kind of obligation to the worn, hunted victim into whom He had once breathed the gift. To all human reckoning cast off, with steps slipping amidst impenetrable shadows, shrinking out of all likeness to upright, divinely endowed manhood "a worm and no man," surely some bond must still exist between God and His creature, through which effectual appeal can be made. "Thou art He that took me out of the womb; Thou didst make me to hope when I was upon my mother's breasts." God cannot be deaf to a plea springing from His own gift of life, for in that gift there was a benign purpose He keeps in view and will yet fulfil. And from that moment of appeal the cloud begins to break and the saddest note ever heard in the wide gamut of lamentation passes at last into a loud peal of victory. Under happier circumstances the same argument is heard again in the Psalm we so often put in the forefront of our worship: "It is He that hath made us and not we ourselves; we are His people and the sheep of His pasture." The gentleness and fidelity of the Divine Shepherd to His charge are firmly rooted in the fact of an original creation. Again the thought recurs in the exhortation, "Let Israel rejoice in Him that made him; let the children of Zion be joyful in their King." Creative acts, original and successive alike, pledge the help and compassion of the great King to all generations, and possessing such an assurance Israel may well rejoice and be glad. "Thy hands have made me and fashioned me; give me understanding that I may learn Thy command-

ments," is the plea of yet another Psalmist. In the soul-shaping and awakening act, the Maker covenanted to give at each succeeding stage wisdom to save from ignorance and rebellion, and to keep the nature in harmony with the eternal law of righteousness and life. God answers back the argument of these appeals by the word of Isaiah, for the appeal is valid before the tribunal of high heaven: "But now saith the Lord that created thee, O Jacob, and formed thee O Israel: Fear not." It is only fitting that we should trust the hands that have fashioned us into both individual and corporate life, for God will never repudiate the responsibilities He has assumed for our best well-being.

This thought of the faithfulness of the Creator admits of many applications in which we may find for ourselves strength, solace, fortitude. St. Peter has just been thinking of *the persecutions and tyrannies which endanger the body*, as well as of those temporal judgments with which God rebukes and awakens to holier vigilance the inmates of his household. This gracious Divine title used by the apostle assures us of a kind Providence which will take into its tender charge all the interests of the outward life. God is not only the Father of our spirits, He is the Maker of our flesh likewise. From the days of the anchorites downwards, there has been a tendency for even Christian believers to minimise the significance of the flesh and its claims. Some of us perhaps conquer our fears, not so much by pure faith, as by philosophical tempers. Let it not be forgotten that this framework within which the personal consciousness is lodged has been shaped, tempered and quickened by God's creative energies, and it is in-

conceivable that He will despise His own handiwork. He is pledged to save it just as much as to save the spirit it enshrines ; and we do not look at things from His standpoint, or duly honour His fidelity when we harden ourselves into mere stoicism as we face the questions that concern the body. What shrinkings of heart sometimes come to God's people when the dissolution of the fleshly tabernacle seems at hand! We speak of the body as mere scaffolding which is to drop away from the perfected spirit, but it is very uncommon scaffolding, built up of tremulous tissue and bound together by webs of awful nerve. We speak of it as the brief enswathement of the diviner half of our natures, a mere garment that will soon be cast aside ; but the garment is woven from the fibres of a very wonderful sensitive plant, and has so bedded itself into our life that we recoil from its dishonourable destination. The senses have ministered so much of good that death cannot but present itself as a despoilment and a deprivation. Whilst firmly hoping for God's mercy to our disembodied spirits, the fatality which is at hand will surely smite us blind, so that we shall no longer see fair and lovely things, and turn us stone deaf, so that we shall no longer hear voices whose accents are music to us ; and afflict us with dumbness, so that we shall no longer be able to utter the things that have been a disburdenment and a delight to us in the telling. Quell such forebodings by remembering that the very husk of our life is God's handiwork ; and if He be true to all that is implied in the name Creator we shall not be robbed by death of the refined satisfactions which are associated with the bodily life. There will be no final loss or privation of the senses. That part of our

conscious life which death threatens to quench we may quietly deliver up into the hands of the faithful Creator.

Types of God's creative power abound around us besides those upon which the outward eye looks—types that in proportion to their surpassing preciousness are stamped with yet stronger pledges of His fidelity. When God ceased from the more conspicuous tasks of a dramatic physical creation, He withdrew into inner realms, and wrought by those subtle methods of which the moral and spiritual life breathed into man was the earnest. "We are His workmanship created . . . to love and good works." More than that, we are created in a new and nobler head of the race, "in Christ Jesus." The forces of His matchless personality, become both the germ and the nutriment of those upbuilding processes which are carried on within us. How much more highly must God esteem this better work, than the firmament which His skill has outspread and adorned; or than the earth, which His word made to blossom into colour and sweeten into dainty fruit! With what complacency must He look on the ever-widening realms of this better creation, which is just beginning to glow with the first reflections of His own spiritual splendour! Will not God prove Himself true to these higher tasks on which He is lavishing finer devotion, deeper counsels, and a love which is mysteriously sacrificial? "He that hath begun the good work will perform it till the day of Jesus Christ." We sometimes look upon the sanctification of the soul as though it were a task left to our poor struggle, and we lose all heart as the goal of excellence seems to retreat from us. But the work which God initiates

can never become a forlorn strife. These contending rudiments of religious life within us have been summoned into being by the Divine breath. Evil there may be in our natures needing to be conquered, errancies needing to be chastened and rectified, crudenesses that must pass away. But there is a Divine fiat behind the work, and it is bound to go on. The light will divide itself from darkness ; harmony, fruitfulness, perfection will emerge from the chaos. God will not lightly cast aside the very pearl of His creative acts. The preparations of the past have been pointing to this issue. The vistas of history lead up to the shrine where God displays His profoundest skill, and sanctifies a human soul. Here at least God will be true to His work and vindicate His name. "If any man be in Christ Jesus he is a new creation," and the creation will have its mighty providence of guardianship.

The Church in its collective life and virtue is also spoken of as one of God's creative works. "I have created Israel for My glory ; I have formed him ; I have fashioned him." That institution is neither a product of pious statecraft nor a self-elected corporation. Over it there broods unseen a creative spirit informing its developments with life and beauty, wisdom and strength. Ere long it will sum up within its order and fellowship the faith, the devotion, the saintliness, the spiritual charm of the separate souls upon whom God has breathed His magic renewal. In the meantime we often despair of its fortunes ; while its many imperfections, far from showing forth the praise of its great founder, make it the occasion of reproach, scoffing, blasphemy. Its moral and intellectual shortcomings intrude so unpleasantly

into view, that we are not always eager to be identified with either its leader or its programmes. It seems as though we lose rather than gain in strength and prestige by casting in our lot with its medley fellowships. Enough for us is it, to tolerate the intimacy of a picked Christian or two, now and again. We should be just as much inclined to pitch our tents amongst the steaming swamps and the dragons and tree-ferns of the carboniferous ages, when the world was only half made, as expect to find our paradise with the rank and file of present-day professors of religion. Notwithstanding all this, God Himself is working in the crude Church which is so often the butt of flippant criticism. He has formed it for His glory, and the peerless beauty and magnificence to which He is bringing it, though by but slow steps, will make us ashamed of our supercilious coldness towards it in the days of its humiliating feebleness and incipiency. More nobly than the starry heavens which tell His glory, and the firmament which showeth forth His handywork, shall the perfected Church yet proclaim His praise. Through all vicissitudes and temptations He will stand by that work to which He has put His hand, for is He not a pledged and a faithful Creator?

Every relationship under which God is made known to us, has its own aspect of truth and its own peculiar note of encouragement, and this relationship of Creator has a striking and characteristic accent of persuasion and helpfulness that cannot fail to impress us. We invoke God as Father, Redeemer, Guide, and ever-present King, and all these terms have their own associations of sympathy and condescending gentleness. God's Fatherhood is sometimes spoken of as though it had eclipsed and superseded all other

names and titles under which God is made known to us. True it is our crowning conception of God, but it does not make the rest needless and unmeaning. Unless the filial temper is within us, overmuch talk of the Divine Fatherhood will savour of cant, and nauseate us into unbelief. Earthly Fatherhood is sometimes a broken reed, and its analogies do not beget faith in every mind alike. There may be circumstances under which the earlier revelation of God as the Maker of all things will be the basis of a more impressive appeal. A father cannot be held responsible for the disposition and character of his son to the same extent as a Creator for his handiwork, inasmuch as many ancestors contribute to the character of a son, and the father may not always see there the best qualities of his own personality. Creatorship may now and again imply more sacred pledge and more stringent obligations than Fatherhood. In some states of mind the thought that God is our Redeemer may not weigh with us as it should ; suggesting as it often does the idea of providential help brought in from outside the original scheme of the universe, an unexpected and incredible interposition like that of the Samaritan in favour of his traditional enemy who had fallen amongst thieves. We are sceptical about this impersonation of foreign pitifulness that appears upon the scene in the nick of time. In the grimness and struggle of our daily life these beautiful ideals of spiritual privilege are apt to vanish, and the Divine names which enshrine our faith seem to become as effete as traditional titles in an age of revolution. But this relationship of Creator goes beyond the rest, and may help us when our faith is ready to fail. It speaks to us in those naturalistic moods when

the higher messages of the gospel seem to pass us by. From the first God has been in organic covenant with His creatures, and His other relations spring up out of this age-long root whose beginnings we cannot probe. He is Redeemer, Counsellor, Friend, and King, because He is first of all our Maker and cannot cast off His workmanship. If moods of stubborn unbelief have imposed themselves upon the soul, if we are so little in accord with the spirit of Divine Fatherhood, that its praises sound in our ear little better than a pious romance, if it is incredible that God should come to us in our guilty coarseness and degradation and ransom us, if we have been so deformed by folly that the stamp of our first creation is gone and we are tempted to write ourselves down as mere drift, refuse, offscouring for which no great destination is conceivable, let us go back to the beginning of things and ask, Did God make us? Does it imply an obligation when God makes that which is sentient? If you can scarcely believe in God, if all the relations in which He has been described to you seem like locked gates of steel from inside of which there comes no answer to your passionate pleading; knock at this door, which was opened with the dawn of life, and shall continue open whilst sun and moon endure. Hast Thou not made me? Canst Thou cast off the work of Thy hands so fearfully and wonderfully formed? and the door will admit you, and thus you will be able to pass in at other doors also leading to holier sanctuaries, and learn that God's relationship to you as Redeemer, Counsellor, Friend and King is involved in this first relation, as all the branches of the tree were once involved in the seed.

One only condition is laid down by the apostle. It

must be in "well doing" that we commit ourselves to these faithful hands. The optimism of the Bible soars nearer to heaven's gate than the optimism of the healthiest and the happiest poets, but it is conditional optimism. In this higher creation God is not dealing with subservient and unresisting matter, but with that stubborn stuff that necessarily enters into the structure of moral agency. However weak, corrupt, prostrate we may be, let us see to it that there is no intractability in our wills, and all the earnest of blessing involved in this wonderful title shall be ours. His benign achievements are not necessary or inevitable. By patient "well doing" we must humbly co-operate with the acts and enterprises of that faithful Creator, into whose hand we commit our cause and the common cause of man. "The Lord will perfect that which concerneth me; the mercy of the Lord endureth for ever; forsake not the work of thine own hands."

XVIII

THE STRONG SANCTUARY

"The rock that is higher than I."—PSA. lxi. 2.
"God is a refuge for us."—PSA. lxii. 8.

THE shelter God's people may always find in His presence is described in the Psalter under many metaphors, obviously drawn from the life of one who had himself been a soldier of fortune. Every device of defensive warfare, every coign of vantage presented by the natural features of the landscape, every outwork planned, constructed, or strengthened by the art of man, is used to set forth the sufficiency and many-sidedness of that guardianship exercised by the Most High over His chosen and loyal servants. In the overflowing ecstasy of his courage and confidence, the singer heaps figure upon figure to set forth his sense of the inviolable peace and security enjoyed by those who have learned to make God their helper. The varying similitudes express substantially the same truth, but we may perhaps be allowed to think that each similitude has its own distinctive note of suggestion. God is described as the "shield" of His servants. The shield was carried by an attendant, and so held as to screen the warrior when he was too much absorbed with the excitement of the combat to

think about himself. With matchless condescension the Lord of hosts goes in and out with His messengers, and in the day of battle covers their heads by His protecting power. The figure seems to teach that the defence of God is cast about our imperilled lives, when the excitement and occupations of the moment make us incapable of screening ourselves from the jeopardies that are thick about our pathway. The "buckler" was a small shield strapped to the left arm of the warrior, so as to ensheath the vital parts of the body and intercept the poisoned arrows and spear-thrusts of the antagonist. If that figure has its own special shade of meaning, will it not indicate the defence we secure for ourselves in the conflicts of life by our valorous faith in God's providence and intimate fellowship with His presence? We bind His covenant promises to our heart, and in the thick of danger prove that He is with us to ward off all mortal hurt. Again, God the Lord is described as "a high tower" and "a fortress." These piles of massive stone are reared at points demanding peculiar vigilance and strength. And all the critical positions and emergencies of our lives God fences about with special displays of His guardian power. The "rock of refuge"—a metaphor which dates back to Moses—is the sure sanctuary made ready with the very beginning of things — a sanctuary which outlasts the rise and fall of cities, and the munitions of man's ephemeral civilisations, and will tower in inviolable strength to the end, unscaled and unstormed by the cunning and the valour of the mightiest adversaries. The power beneath which God's servants may make their home and their dwelling-place, endures from age to age. Into the calm of that unchanging presence

we are all invited to come and sing of sure victory and salvation.

An ineradicable *sense of dependence inheres in every finite being* as he is brought into conscious life. It is true there are those who have tried to rid themselves of this sense of dependence upon what is greater than themselves; but the unconfessed instinct has slumbered within them still, a source of intractable torment, an instrument of inevitable revenges. A created nature must go out of itself and make its sanctuary in a greater and holier nature before it can be rightly centred and rationally satisfied. All finite life shows itself such by soliciting, sooner or later, an infinite life upon which to recline. If we are only competent to read and interpret experience, this will be found to be its unanimous and final testimony. The predisposition to lean, to nestle, to seek sanctuary, is the common birthmark of everything in which there is the breath of life. It is true that pride may sometimes make us intolerant of superiority, but in the long run such pride will be its own punishment. Herodotus tells the story of an ancient tyrant, who sent a slave to a mighty neighbour for hints in statecraft. The despot whose counsels were asked, went out into the fields and began plucking off the ears of corn which had outshot the rest. The slave went back to his master and related what he had seen, concluding that this great ruler must be beside himself. The hint was shrewdly interpreted, and the tyrant began picking off all the talented and ambitious men in his territory till he found himself surrounded only by those less capable than himself. To live in a realm in which there was no one wiser, better, more resourceful than ourselves would be

terrible as hell to most men, before many years had run their course. To mow down those who transcend us, will prove folly and infatuation when the days of calamity and distress draw on apace.

Rather than have no refuge at all, *the troubled man will fly to one who is weaker and less discerning than himself.* A strange compulsion, either in the air he breathes or in the life that courses through his veins, drives him to that. He will consult an authority he cannot trust, rather than be shut up within the ring-fence of his own infirm and imperfect personality. The castaway on an unknown shore will make the savage he has enlisted into his service a confidant, and teach his own speech to the parrot, so that he may hear some other voice, rather than be abandoned to his own resources. The general who has lost a battle, and whose habit it has been to maintain a severe aloofness from every member of his staff, will take counsel in the days of defeat and humiliation with a dependent, and discuss schemes of campaign with a cook or a camp-follower, rather than be left alone. The king whose crown has been snatched away, will cast himself on his meanest page as though he were the prime minister himself; for he must get away from his own false steps, the cruel, cast-iron fate that locks him in, and the spectacle of a derelict royalty presented in his own person. In wreck and lonely disaster the shipmaster will confer with his least trustworthy seaman, for he must fly from his own mistakes and crushing misfortune. The lost traveller in the desert will yield himself at last to the instincts of his horse or camel, for he has a maddening horror of the repeated misjudgments which are taking him farther and yet farther from wells of water,

palm-trees, and the tents and habitations of men. We must have some kind of refuge outside ourselves, if it be but the beggar's cave. It would be a poor look-out for us if there were nothing within our horizon measuring up to a loftier altitude than our own few paltry cubits of stature. What a wilderness of peril, torture, trepidation this earthly life would be if there were no high citadel, no strong fortress, no enduring refuge, open for us to run into! We need to lean on one towering aloft above this poor, decrepit nature of ours, to fly to the overshadowing power of the Most High, to penetrate the inmost secret of His love. We demand that which transcends ourselves, yet is at the same time gentle, gracious, sympathising. We must have something able to match itself with the strong forces of destruction playing around us, before which we are so helpless. "Lead me to the rock that is higher than I." Nothing that is on our own level can quiet our fear and appease our distress.

And in all probability *this applies to other realms of life* than those in which we move. The instinct which bids the finite spirit look for strength on which to lean, is not due entirely to the way in which human beings grow out of helplessness into the maturity of conscious wisdom, capability, resource. It might be fairly argued, that the sense of indebtedness to external care and guardianship, has been impressed upon our faculties by the fact that we have crept slowly and painfully up from infantile beginnings; and that no such sense of dependence can characterise those who have leaped out of nothingness into full-orbed greatness, if such beings exist. The analogies of God's methods, scarcely lead us to think that even the sons of light were created in all their complete

grandeur and perfection by a swift fiat. But if the archangel were brought out of the void into majestic intelligence and far-stretching dominion, without any sense of dependence upon another rooted at the very core of his consciousness, his condition would surely be one of superb madness and titanic pain. The wisest seraph, the most fervent spirit of flame, the strongest messenger of the eternal throne, could not be satisfied with a life of perpetual and unbroken introspection, even were no unhappy sin awaiting discovery. It is true he knows no guilty fear, needs no cover from pursuing foes, and across his pathway the shadows of death cannot fall. Nothing gross, unworthy, ignoble, has ever found entrance into his character or disposition. And yet he would hate his own personality, if he were shut up within it and could not find refuge in one more transcendently perfect than himself. Destined to look into an eternal mirror and see there only his own reflection, he would think himself in a region of torment. The pure, great angels still nestle in the shadow of God's throne, and make it their refuge, as children cling to their protectors. How much more must that be so for sinful, fear-chased, death-doomed man ! My own instincts, apart from the question of sin, constrain me to seek a Divine refuge. If I represented in myself the limit of perfection, and could not look away to one wiser, stronger, tenderer, the universe would be to me a chamber of untold horror.

This instinct of dependence is *sharpened into pain and terror by the moral guilt and transgression* of which thinking men are so keenly conscious. Most strangely, we both worship and loathe ourselves, at one moment rioting in our excess of egoism, and at

another longing to become fugitives from our own name, memory, and person. With what sharp and treacherous contradictions our natures teem! Our hearts are ever persuading us, that the sin which lies uncommitted in an untrodden pathway, is the sweetest and most inviting thing in the universe; but once committed, the self-same heart declares boldly that it is the most shameful, loathsome, and jeopardising thing of which we are capable. That which was so bright, fair, pleasing, is all at once armed with fangs, poison-sacs, fiery stings, fastening upon our most delicate sensibilities with undetachable fury. It seems impossible for us to get away from trepidation, mental pain, and self-loathing unless we disperse and destroy those essentials of personality which hedge us in with the inevitableness of eternity. For the one who has strayed by infinitesimal measurements from the path of innocence, life becomes an insupportable terror if he must needs be entirely shut up within himself. The eagerness to enter into the pathos and comedy of other lives; the craving for those oblivions created by the excitements of the world; the diligence in cultivating comradeships which rest upon community of taste, talent, character, or upon no conceivable basis whatever; the perpetual clamour for new sensations;— all these things are symptomatic of the desire of the human heart to get away from the despotisms of its own passions and the grim round of unflattering memories, and to find peace, forgetfulness, mental sanctuary amongst strangers. But these refuges in which a man seeks to hide away from himself, are mere walls of network and stockades of reed, fortresses of bubbles and windbags, fantastic vacancies. We had better live

with the weird, rampant woes of the apocalyptic vision, looking on famine, putrefaction, disease ; better be chained to madness, leprosy, and death, than be shut up to the fixed contemplation of one's own personality, when the awaking to true thought begins, and we realise how low we who once bore the Divine image have fallen. We are driven out of ourselves. We dare not look steadily at our sin, unless we first make our refuge in God and look at that sin through His forgiving mercy.

The religious philosophies of the East all illustrate this tendency to seek escape from the dull, oppressive burdens of conscious personality. The Oriental is a born dreamer ; and when the habit of intense introspection asserts itself, the thought of the sinning and suffering self within becomes unwelcome, and at last intolerable. It is synonymous with every kind of pain, with a pride and self-esteem that must be inevitably vexed and abased, with a fact we have been taught to describe as sin, but which is obnoxious, at least to some extent, to natures nurtured in less strict and holy traditions ; and personality at last becomes a torment. This tendency is perhaps accelerated by the littleness and limitations of the gods who have been objects of worship, or by the lovelessness of an impersonal infinite. The devotee wants to lose his Ego in the vast vacancies of space. Where there is no knowledge of a holy and infinitely strong compassion inviting men to find rest, defence, forgiveness, under its benign shadow, no wonder that personality is looked upon as a mark of imperfection and a brand of guilt and pain. But for our knowledge of the higher Rock into which the Psalmist prayed to be led, we ourselves should show

the same inclination, and indeed do when we once renounce the hopes and promises of the gospel.

Mingled with the Psalmist's desire to find escape from the sin and sorrow that sometimes burdened him there was *a dread of the cunning and fury of his many adversaries.* Whilst he often pleads his loyalty to the Divine will and his innocence of the things laid to his charge, he yet feels that, like the rest of his race, he is a mark for the Divine judgments; and of those judgments his adversaries may possibly prove themselves the instruments. Like the first transgressor, he is a fugitive in the wilderness, and his original panoply is gone. Weak, helpless, unarmed in the midst of warring hosts, he must fly to God, the rock of refuge. And he was sensible of that even in the days of his power and prosperity. Again and again he was made to feel, when his popularity was at the highest, that latent antagonisms were smouldering in his kingdom, and that he owed his safety and his defence to God alone.

And in these last times we want God not only as a sanctuary from the evil that is within us, but likewise from that which is more or less rampant around us. We boast of the safety of life and property throughout the length and breadth of Christian lands, of the strong foundations upon which the fabric of our humane civilisation rests. But we are reminded at intervals that the wild-beast temper is not extinct, and that we are as much cast upon an invisible defence as were God's servants in barbaric ages. We sometimes speak of the Englishman's house as his castle, but before the State reforms of which this saying is a smug boast came to pass, perhaps it was not always urgent for men to live in castles. They gathered

together in groups cemented by common blood, and whilst there were dangers from the distant enemy, those on the right hand and on the left were brothers, kinsfolk, clansmen. The enemy may lurk nearer to us than in those centuries upon which we look as unprivileged. We should not like some of the people who are not many yards away to work their will upon us and our families. There are foul spirits passing to and fro in forms of flesh we should not care to meet on equal ground in another world. We need the invisible as well as the visible defences thrown about our life now; and we shall need to dwell under the protecting shadow of God's throne when we have left the scenes of time and sense for ever. We want that rock of refuge, that inviolable sanctuary, which can be found in God, and in God alone.

Science has brought no deliverance from our fears, and *the world is just as much a haunted place for us as for the savage* crouching in forests of primeval gloom. We have become familiarised with impersonal terrors more stupendous than those which oppressed the earlier generations of men. Science points to a near horizon where forces are hovering which threaten, if not our own life and happiness, yet at least the very existence of our posterity. The bombs of the anarchist are squibs in comparison. It is within a few degrees of temperature only, as the thermometer measures things, that the fortunes of the race tremble to their fall; and when the boundary lines are once exceeded, the race itself must inevitably perish. The possibility of human history turns upon the finest imaginable equipoise of material forces. The stage on which we eat and drink, laugh and weep, fight our battles, and work out the sacred mystery of

love that is in us, is but a tiny handbreadth. The world has swept through fervours in which no life known to us could survive, and some of our planets shimmer in the same intense heats to-day. It is said that in order to produce the evaporation out of which comes the snow to build a glacier, an amount of heat is required which would melt a mass of iron five times the volume of the glacier itself. We are told, on the other hand, that the cold of absolute space is four hundred degrees below zero. The temperature of the Arctic and Antarctic circles is that of the dog-days in comparison. Cruel cold hems us in on the one side and devastating heat on the other; and our life perches itself on a little ledge between these portentous extremes. We are poised midway between gulfs of ice and abysses of fire, and it is on the frailest and most precarious foothold we pass our days. The thought of these vast, impersonal forces should surely drive us to make our refuge in the pitiful, personal God. Does it not horrify us to think, that we or our children may be at the mercy of whirling, turbulent, pitiless, erratic energies of destruction? From the menace and the consuming desolation of the universe we must needs fly to a Divine sanctuary. These conceptions of destructive energy affright and overwhelm us, for the moral gloom within projects itself into all these vistas of thought; and we must come back to the love, compassion, and gracious providence of God. Space itself offers us no sure and inviolable home, and our earthly resting-place seems ready to fail and betray us, like the frail bird's nest swaying and crackling in the hurricane a few inches above the racing forest fire. We need a mighty, vigilant, Divine friendship for our sanctuary.

In his book on the "Great Ice Age," one of our popular astronomers tells us that the earth has passed through several periods of glaciation, and yet its manifold kingdoms of life have been wonderfully preserved. These periods occur at intervals of twenty-one thousand years, and alternate between the two hemispheres. Plant and animal alike outlive epochs of terrible cold, because the transitions are gradual, and the northern and southern halves of the planet have never been glaciated at the same time. Herbs, trees, and flowers, like Arab or Indian tribes, change their camping-grounds at the bidding of circumstance. As century by century the vast ice-sheets pushed themselves southwards, lower and higher forms of life alike migrated, crossing the fast-cooling tropics into the genial south; and then when the ice-sheet began to retreat, and the glaciation of the southern hemisphere set in, the wave of migration turned to flow in the opposite direction. It is wonderful that frail flowers and rooted trees should seem to know what is coming, and send the seeds from which their successors are to spring upon these long quests for sunshine and salvation. More than once have the collective families of both animal and vegetable life, moved backwards and forwards from pole to pole like an oscillating pendulum; and the scheme of things has so adjusted itself that epochs of cold in one hemisphere were balanced by epochs of warmth in the other. Never has the door of refuge been shut. Over against the glaciated there has always been a genial half of the planet. Shelter has opened somewhere to embosom the life God put upon the earth. The monsters of the early epochs, it is true, have perished, but lowly species of

plants and generations of helpless insects that murmured amongst the leaves have found nooks of happy hiding and realms of balmy refuge in which to outlive these portentous changes.

And is not Nature herself God's parable waiting our interpretation of its inner message? Do not these gigantic revolutions, which have never exterminated the creature wherein is life, seem to assure us that, when pressed by terror, tribulation, death itself, God will open to us warm and loving sanctuaries, delectable mountains, tablelands of balm and beauty walled about by munitions of rocks, serene, sun-lit refuges, where we shall find rest, shelter, unassailable blessedness? Cold and shadow, silence and solitude, like that of the Ice Age, may steal over the realms in which our lot has been cast; for all of us the stiff, inexorable glaciation of death will creep on and enshroud our homes, our relationships, our enterprises; but benign shelters will strangely open their welcome to us who fly for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us in the gospel. We may find our sure sanctuary for time and for eternity, in God's faithful and unchanging love. Fleeing from ourselves and from all the terrors that pursue us, bidding farewell to the very sins that seem as inseparable from us as our shadows, we may make our dwelling-place and abiding home in the brightness of His ever-faithful presence.

This strong and enduring sanctuary can only afford its peace and shelter to our troubled spirits, when we are willing to accept terms of reconciliation with God. "God is a refuge for us," but we cannot hide in the refuge and at one and the same time be estranged from God. The melancholy perplexity of many around us consists in this, that they crave a hiding-

place from the evils and terrors which infest human life, and yet they cannot or will not turn their faces Godward. The centrifugal tendency seen in Cain when he fled from the face of the Lord, and yet shuddered at the thought of the pain, execration, antagonism, which were everywhere confronting him in his flight, reappears in us. We want to leave both God and the terrors which beleaguer our steps behind; and the two things are incompatible. We must humble our pride, consent to be contrite, accept God's truce if we are to come into the impregnable sanctuary of His gentleness and power. When we turn unto the Lord with all our hearts, we shall find that His defence will compass us about. He is a rock, and the rock outlasts the perishable works of man.

Earthly sanctuaries pass away. In the early centuries of our history, the church which stood upon the site of the General Post Office in London enjoyed the right of giving sanctuary to fugitives from a broken law, and that right covered a square mile of the neighbourhood. But with our changing laws and civilisations the right of sanctuary has become obsolete, and the fugitive from justice to-day would be likely to find there, not shelter and immunity, but speedy arrest. The rock of refuge of which the Psalmist speaks never crumbles. It will not mock us by becoming the mere landmark of a dead promise. "Lord, Thou hast been our dwelling-place from one generation to another." Whilst the day still lingers, let us fly to that hiding-place, so that, having found sure foothold there, we and our children may make God our strength and our song in the days of our pilgrimage; and without fear may face both the changes of time, and the supreme solemnities of the judgment.

XIX

THE INDWELLING WORD OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

"But the righteousness which is of faith speaketh on this wise, Say not in thine heart, Who shall ascend into heaven? (that is, to bring Christ down from above): or, Who shall descend into the deep? (that is, to bring up Christ again from the dead). But what saith it? The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart: that is, the word of faith, which we preach: that if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved."—ROM. x. 6–8.

THESE words are a free quotation or paraphrase from one of the last addresses of Moses to the children of Israel. Moses declares that the word he had taught the people and to which they had pledged their obedience by covenant, was within the compass of their power to appreciate and to fulfil. They had no need to enter upon a long and arduous search, for God Himself had come nigh with His word. The word was not afar off. This saying of the great lawgiver, recorded by the writer of the Book of Deuteronomy, perhaps receives something of its specific colouring from memories of the sojourn in the land of Egypt. Religion was in no sense made easy in the schools and colleges which flourished on the banks of the Nile. It was mixed up with abstruse studies, and claimed as a monopoly by

castes, into which men could only be received after a severe novitiate. In those strange old cities, select thinkers were grappling with the elements of primitive astronomy, inspired by the hope that they would one day come to read thereby the spiritual secret of the universe. At that early period, as was certainly the case some centuries afterwards, Egypt may have been visited by men of other races who had crossed seas in the quest of wisdom. These inquirers now and again took back ideas which tended, in a greater or less degree, to modify the faith of their fatherlands. While Moses was still a *protégé* at the court of Pharaoh, groups of truth-seekers from afar may have visited this land of wonders and have sat for a time at the feet of its priests. The founder of a new system of religion or philosophy is always tempted to emphasise its difficulties, and to claim that comprehension of great mysteries is the distinction of the few. It is the pride of the human heart which tends to make religion occult rather than obvious, and such a notion is always a discouragement to the mean and unpretending learner. These poor serfs of the brickfields, may have heard from time to time of laborious journeys for research into the mysteries of Egypt, and may have looked with mingled awe and curiosity upon the proud schools and the exclusive castes that were products of this early civilisation; and, moreover, they may have been tempted to think, that for men whose lot had been little better than that of beasts of burden, religion was a hopeless science and a tangle of impossible tasks. If long discipline, arduous initiation, triumph over the limitations of the body were the pathway of access to God, their spiritual aspirations were inevitably doomed to

vanity and failure. The tradition of such methods would necessarily depress the strength, capacity, and hope of the elect people. Moses felt this, and he declares that in the obligations more immediately binding upon them there was nothing abstruse, far-fetched, unattainable ; that the sublimest religion commenced with very simple steps ; that inasmuch as God had spoken to them in various ways, His word was in them, and that in learning the spiritual secret of the universe they had no need to travel outside themselves. A child was quite capable of what had been asked. The truth was not far off in space or time or thought. It had been the work of Moses to remind this people in God's name of claims that were self-evident, to revive by his instructions a latent and impaired sense of righteousness, and to restore them to open converse with the Divine. So far the Old Covenant anticipated the New, and might be described in the same terms.

This utterance from the lips of the ancient law-giver the apostle quotes with changes and evangelical comments of his own. That the word is in us, and neither afar off in the heavens nor beyond the sea, is true in a sense lacking under the old dispensation. The indwelling word of which Moses spake was a word of knowledge and inspired precept. The indwelling word to which the apostle refers is a word of free, forgiving, and life-renewing promise and power. The Giver of the word attends His own message to vindicate its saving energies. He is not in heaven waiting for some master-spirit of the human race, to summon Him to His redeeming ministries. He is not in the abodes of the dead waiting for the herald whose trumpet-notes shall call

Him from the oppressive shadows to His enthronement of sovereign help. The Eternal Son has come down to take our flesh and make Himself partner of our curse and shame. He who was crucified, dead and buried, has ascended from the abyss and pleads for us at the right hand of power. And the forces of that sovereignty which He has reached as the fruit of His sojourn among men assert themselves in our hearts through His justifying word. The many and inseparable virtues issuing from His life, death and exaltation convey themselves into the message of the gospel and are asserted within the shrine of each believing soul. "The word is nigh in our mouth and in our heart." The gospel is not the mere impression made within the brain of a dim and incomprehensible mystery, but it is a sign to us of the abiding and soul-vitalising presence of the Redeeming Lord Himself—a presence that is at our right hand and within us.

I. These words assert the principle that saving truth inspheres itself within all souls heedful of the gospel message, and suggest *a contrast to the distinctive conceptions of paganism.* He who is the source of grace, illumination, redeeming strength cannot be localised, nor has He made the pathway of access to Himself one of superhuman hardness. He is manifested for salvation wherever men are ready for His appearing. And this contrast is involved in the first form of the words used by Moses, as well as in the elaborate evangelical adaptation of them made by Paul. Moses simplified saving duty, and disencumbered it of those fatal accretions which had gathered around it in other systems of faith. And in the language of

the text this contrast is maintained and intensified into a second contrast. Christianity simplified the terms of salvation beyond the limits of Moses himself, and was fraught with a helpfulness and a rich promise, wanting even to the most favoured developments of Judaism. Hence Paul's right to use the words employed by Moses to describe the promise of righteousness by faith in Jesus Christ.

The tendency to seek salvation in that which is rare, distant, difficult of approach is characteristic of all forms of pagan thought and superstition, and has its rise in the common instincts of human nature. To find the pathway of escape from evil and disfavour, the seer must pass through trance and rapture and visit the upper heavens, and the plain man who lacks the gift of the seer must become, for a time at least, a devotee and go upon hot, long and weary pilgrimages of worship to some sacred temple or city at the very ends of the earth.

The highways of the ancient world grew out of the tracks left by the feet of pilgrims, and many a voyage across the untraversed sea was a religious quest. In every caravan of traders, men might be found who were pushing their way to shrines of renown or to the feet of priests and prophets said to be special oracles of the gods. In those days, as now, the arduous religious pilgrimage was a symptom of defective faith in God and His methods of saving men into righteousness. The Queen of Sheba came to Jerusalem as a religious pilgrim, seeking to master other principles besides those of statecraft. For her the word was afar off upon the sea. And long before her time, India, Persia, Arabia, Egypt, the shores of the Levant had their sanctuaries to

which streams of visitors from other lands came continuously as the flight of birds. The thought that truth was "afar off upon the sea" was the substratum in the Greek legend about the "Isles of the Blest" which lay in the untrodden pathway of the setting sun. In the early centuries of the Christian era, devout scholars from China sought out the famous centres of Indian Buddhism to master its sacred lore and possess themselves of relics which were to become the attracting and consecrating treasures in Chinese shrines. This notion repudiated by Moses, is the moving motive of that unresting stream of Mahommedan adventure which finds its way to Mecca from Southern Europe, Northern Africa, and every part of Asia, whose track may be followed by the drift of white bones in the desert sand. A survival of this superstition, common to all religions, was the animating motive of those crusades which fill such a large place in the Middle Ages; as well as of modern pilgrimages to the tombs and grottoes of saints, recorded in the daily press when a nobleman joins the throng. These wayfarers are going about to seek a righteousness and a salvation not to be found at home; and are as much victims of misconception as Saul, when he was on the way to Damascus to improve his standing with God by the persecution of the disciples.

Such arduous adventures took their rise in complex motives and beliefs. Amongst many races the idea prevailed that the gods had their "spheres of influence," and had parcelled out amongst each other the territories of the earth. Certain gods were supposed to favour certain soils and to take pleasure in particular tribes. To men of mean

and poverty-stricken minds it seemed impossible for a Divine Being to be equally present and operative at the same time in all parts of the world. And when idolatry had to agree upon working terms with Pantheistic theories of the universe, it was held, that just as the intelligence immanent in the body focuses itself in special organs of the body such as eyes, ears, and finger-tips, so the Divine intelligence concentrated itself in chosen places of the earth that must be made shrines, and in certain men who deserve to rank as oracles and demigods, and whose word claims obedience. But there can be little doubt that many religious pilgrimages took their rise in a sense of the scantiness of spiritual knowledge and profound ethical dissatisfaction. Those in whom moral and religious instincts were strong, became valetudinarians wandering through the earth in search of spiritual health. The pilgrimage in some cases was intended to be propitiatory. To undo sin was difficult, and to do righteousness scarcely less difficult, and men tried to atone for their inability to do one hard thing by doing another almost equally hard. Whilst they had the sense of sin and no right sense of the love of God, they were driven to seek righteousness upon the sea and beyond it, or by winning some secret from the skies.

Now the message of Moses, into which Paul puts a new soul of evangelical truth, did at least rid religion of these restrictions. Jehovah was no geographical potentate shut in by frontiers, whose word was hidden in impenetrable horizons. Those old views of God and His commandment left little or no grace for the poor, the ignorant, the crippled, the home-bound, the

helpless. The God who spake by Moses was above the limitations of time and space, and had entered into gracious and constant relationship with these people. He had not erected impassable barriers between His sacred person and the children of Abraham His friend. He was not waiting to be sought, for this shifting camp of Israelites had become His shrine. His sympathies were impartial. He did not commune with the mystic and hide His salvation from the embruted serf, and His ever-present commandment was the easy pathway of ascent into salvation.

Paul adapts and applies these words of Moses *to the redemptive work of Jesus Christ.* The quotation is not haphazard, for the apostle is not in the habit of dropping into ready-made phrases which have no essential fitness to his argument. There is the same vital principle underlying the original use of these words and the apostle's enlargement of them. God still further simplifies the processes of salvation by an unexampled exercise of goodwill. Something more than a trance ascension into the skies or a journey to a far-off shrine is called for if men are to be restored to righteousness and God. A helper has been sent from God's throne, has passed into the oppressive shadows of the abyss and has gone back to the right hand of power. And God clothes with His own mighty attributes the Word which tells of the work of His Son, and wherever that Word is preached vitalises it into soul-redeeming virtue. Such is the eternal love which is seeking to bring us nigh that it has put within reach of every one of us, a righteousness which begins in honest faith, and to enter upon whose benefits no superhuman adventures need be undertaken.

We cannot do a greater dishonour to God than by thinking that the grace through which we are justified, is shut up in some secret hiding-place in either heaven above or earth beneath. What should we think of a Creator, who had made ready a world for our habitation, where the springs of water were as rare as gold reefs? What should we think of a Providence that had thrust us into a climate where vitalising breezes were as hard to find as in the Black Hole of Calcutta? Things there are within in God's keeping more necessary to our well-being than water in the fiercest drought or the stirring of the air in suffocating heat. It is inconceivable that He should have left us in realms where grace and truth could only be found at far-off shrines, and the word that justifies and saves should have a cruelly narrow range of currency. Moses the lawgiver had got beyond that, and felt that God could not prescribe hard terms of salvation. God was so pitiful and kind that He had made it easy for men to stand in His favour. And under the New Covenant that truth receives more lucid illustration. We have not to set out on some stupendous journey to find God. God has become the pilgrim to find us and dwells in our midst. "He is come" in the person of His Son "to seek and to save the lost," and continues His glorious quest from generation to generation. His tabernacle is with us.

II. The righteousness of faith as interpreted by St. Paul is inward and *contrasts with those rounds of self-exalting service to which the heart of man is everywhere prone.* The tendency to localise Divine grace at centres that can only be reached through amazing exploits is not an abstract error only, but

has its deepest roots in human pride. If wrong can be expiated and right re-established in the life by difficult enterprise, painstaking service, costly and elaborate heroism, deeds that win a name for sanctity, the process is not so humbling as it otherwise would be, and the need for confession and self-abasement is more or less disguised. The further aloof from the pathway of simple duty the method of seeking the Divine favour is, the more grateful is it to our ambition, egoism, and self-esteem. "Ignorant of God's righteousness and going about to establish their own." It is a mark of justifying faith that it has attained central restfulness and is anchored within an inviolable refuge. It has been brought to recline in the secret pavilion of Him who is "the Lord our righteousness." On the other hand, the unbelieving Pharisee, of ancient and modern type alike, has wandered from the Divine centre and seeks righteousness through ever-widening circles of vainglorious deeds, finding only disquiet and frustration.

Those who are resolved to justify themselves do not want a Saviour who comes to them of His own compassionate intent and offers His life as a sacrifice for sin. "Who shall ascend into heaven? Who shall descend into the deep?" The Deliverer must be fetched by our mandate, and the fact of spontaneous pity in God is ignored. In the Pharisee's method of recovering the soul to righteousness, the starting-point is on earth, and not in heaven. Redemption begins in the human rather than in the Divine initiative. We must devise the plan for our return to God. Our welcome of the Saviour will not be cordial, unless He has been brought by the hand

of our emissary and conducted in triumph along our particular pathway. The Great Deliverer must be our client and fall in with the part we want to play. If we cannot save ourselves, we at least must send to bring Christ down and commission a strong helper who shall descend into the abyss to bring Christ up. We cannot accept a salvation wrought out for us, and that too in spite of ourselves.

The attitude of the Jewish rulers towards Jesus Christ in the early part of His ministry was coloured by this temper. At the outset the synagogues were not entirely hostile to Jesus Christ, but they thought that He should submit His credentials to their authority and work in harmony with their traditional rights. He should go forth as one whom they had commissioned, and they should have some hand in shaping His programme. He should work out salvation as a servant of their ideas. They could scarcely conceive of a redemption that His hand alone should bring near.

And that thought variously disguised influences us in ways of which we are scarcely conscious. We are not altogether tolerant of the idea that He should come unasked to die for us, and that our best deeds should be of little account in harmonising us again with the Divine righteousness. That seems to leave nothing for us to do and involves our self-effacement. And this vaunting temper lurks more insidiously than we may imagine in some of the intellectual movements of the present day. It was present in that Neo-Buddhist movement which some little time ago was quite the craze in London, Paris, and New York. Perhaps in some cases that movement was a flippant affectation, and, as such, scarcely worthy of

serious notice. In so far as it represented a real trend in modern thought, it was influenced by the age-long temper which is ever set upon the vindication and recovery when lost of a "righteousness which is according to the law." The confession is sometimes heard from thoughtful, right-loving men and women, that it is nobler to endure the penalty of one's own wrong-doing, however many the lives through which that penalty may stretch, than to accept a system under which pain is assumed to be laid upon another. It is allowed by those who feel the burden of their own past folly and selfishness that sin cannot be lightly and swiftly expiated. Possibly such a series of reincarnations as Buddhism postulates, may be needful if the effect of wrong is to be eliminated from the character and destiny. Allowing that forgiveness is not possible through the act of another, the offender must bear his own punishment in many lives, bow beneath the law of recompense in unknown cycles of humiliation and pain; and having worked out the debt, through bitter experiences in the flesh and out of the flesh, emerge at last into truth, freedom, and established righteousness. People of the best culture and of a noble Christian stock, have sometimes told the preacher that for them this is the more attractive idea. It is heroic and magnanimous to take the chastisement for one's own faults, however long that chastisement may continue, and less wounding to one's self-respect. They are content if it is possible to go through many cycles of transmigration, so that they may at last establish their own righteousness which is of the law. In the common things of life it is well to be self-reliant and to take with a certain amount of courage

and intrepidity the just consequences of our own acts. We do not want to impose unnecessary burdens upon our comrades, and if the need arises we will choose to work out our destiny unhelped. But such a temper may be carried too far even in the trivial affairs of this life. There are, however, awful burdens that we must be content to see placed upon another. The helplessness we feel in view of the great fact of sin, is an incident which should compel us to sink our pride, and find our righteousness in the mercy and merit of One who is higher and holier than ourselves. Self-reliance is a virtue when we are struggling side by side with those who have to bear burdens of their own and have little strength for their neighbours'; but it is wicked pride when we are crushed by a burden that has become impossible for us to bear and which the infinite Love and Strength seeks to lift from our groaning spirits.

III. The righteousness of faith as set forth by the Apostle Paul *rebukes the shiftlessness and self-exculpation* in which the attempt to win back God's favour by meritorious service always ends. As the mind opens more and more to perceive the enormity of both inward and outward sin, there will necessarily be a tendency to increase the severity of the service, that it is thought will atone for sin. The mind will not rest unless it establish some imaginary ratio between the wrong-doing of the past and the deeds which are judged a fit reparation for it. And at last men feel that reparation is impossible and the Pharisaism of the few abets the negligence of the many. And during the time occupied by these experiments pride will have grown to yet greater strength. When these two things are in possession

of the field,—pride combined with the sense of failure in an impossible task,—the result will be listlessness and self-exculpation. Men will seek to cover their shame by discourse of an impracticable redemption. We try to divert attention from ourselves and shift the onus of responsibility by the question, "Who will go into heaven?" and "Who will descend into the abyss?"

Parallel processes of feeling may be seen at work in the common things of life. The man who is proud and at the same time comes short of success is always tempted to put the cause of failure outside himself. When his fortunes prosper he is ready enough to claim much credit and to maintain that circumstances had little to do with his advancement. But the pitiful stragglers in the race for wealth or fame did not happen to be born under lucky stars. Every village has its man who is a genius, lacking rare books and happy opportunities. We have all met inventors in the chrysalis who would have done startling things if research had been endowed, or if they had possessed private fortunes, enabling them to work out their ideas. The amateur chemist would have distanced every contemporary, if only he could have gone to Paris or Heidelberg to complete his studies. How that second-rate dauber would have shone in the Academies of Europe, if in the plastic stages of his early manhood he could have visited the East or studied the colour combinations in tropical sunsets! What a poet our next-door neighbour would have been if he could have nursed his genius on glaciers and pine woods! That man who has three times compounded with his creditors, would have been a millionaire if

he could have gone to the colonies forty years ago. He has never been distinguished for thrift and industry at home, but how he would have worked if he had been on an Australian sheep farm or a Texas cattle ranch, or if some good angel had dropped him down at the diamond-fields! For men of this type, the one element wanting to complete success was exactly that element which was distant, hard of access, inscrutably withheld. These are the crest-fallen, listless, out-at-elbows Pharisees of our social life. They forget the romance of office-boys who became millionaires, pitmen whose inventions have made modern civilisation possible, ploughmen who sang sweetly as the very birds, peasants who learned to paint like great Nature herself. To the eye that sees, beauty is always at hand. As an American poet says—

> "He that wanders widest, lifts
> No more of Beauty's jealous veil
> Than he who from his doorway sees
> The miracle of flowers and trees."

The vain, shiftless disposition always seeks for the consummation of its gifts and the harvesting of its hopes in that which is far off, rather than in that which is within.

It is the sure tendency of Pharisaism to produce a corresponding type of listlessness and self-exculpating pride in religion, which the words of the text rebuke. Paul's interpretation of the work of Christ is intended to do in a greater, what the legislation of Moses did in a less degree, to make righteousness an attainable ideal and condemn the temper of slothfulness and neglect. The saving word is not inscrutably hidden,

even from the lowliest and the least favoured of those to whom it is preached. It comes with all its mystic promise and potency to abide within us. Men are prone to fritter away their days gazing into impossible horizons, whilst they are treading the fields in which a treasure is hidden that is able to make them rich with eternal possessions. They dream of the fountains of pleasure which are at God's right hand; and wait for a race of spiritual Titans who shall build mighty aqueducts to convey life-giving streams to their doors, and all the while a stranger is sitting in their midst who can quench the thirsts of the deathless spirit. There is a dearth of the incorruptible seed, and they wait till some magic hand shall bring it from afar, though all the time it is behind the rusted locks and moss-grown doors of their own granaries and they perish with hunger. The Saviour hides Himself in distant realms from which their alms and prayers have failed to draw Him. He is in a heaven of selfish splendour, or helpless in the dim abyss of death-shadows. At least He is not here and our struggles after righteousness and salvation are futile. Now, these are the difficulties we conjure up to disguise our failures. Thus to think restores us to our evil complacency, and we are no longer haunted by the thought that He is still coming to His own and His own receive Him not. But if Paul's interpretation of the work of Jesus is true, all the resources of the great redemption are at hand. The shrine of sacrifice, the throne of intercession, and the conquering King Himself are present with the word. For him who believes and makes brave avowal of his faith, the heart is cleansed. As effectually as at the altar of the holy place not made with hands,

the interceding presence broods in every sincere prayer, and the lusts and malignities haunting the soul are quelled as decisively as the tyranny of death itself. The victories of that wondrous war with principalities and powers are repeated within us. "The word is nigh even in our mouth and in our heart."

IV. The righteousness which is by faith is in *contrast to the note of fatalism and despair* which murmurs through the soliloquy of the man who is seeking to be justified by the works of the law. "Who will bring down Christ?" "Who will raise Him from the abyss?" are questions that express a mood of fixed and unbelieving hopelessness. Pharisaic dreams of self-salvation beget, in the secondary stage, shiftlessness and inaction, ending at last in limp, melancholy submission to the impossible. These successive stages of character are linked together, like different generations from a common ancestor dwelling together in the same family group. In these questions which the message of the gospel prohibits, there is a tone of absurd impossibility, reminding us of the contemptuous inquiry of the Pharisee who came to Jesus by night, "How can a man be born when he is old?" What cannot be done or proved by us or our contemporaries is beyond the range of reasonable belief. It is madness to think that the Deliverer is here, if He has not been brought down by one from our midst. Had He come we should surely have seen the sign in heaven. If the realms above and beneath us are beyond the scope of our exploration it is idle to think of One who is here as the Messenger of God's goodwill, and who, having passed into the abyss and tasted death for us, has risen to

light and life and everlasting dominion. There is no term to the long waiting of the man who seeks assured justification through his own acts, for it involves things as impossible as an ascent into heaven and a descent into the abyss of disembodied souls.

But the word of faith declares that Christ, who in His efficacious work has touched all realms, waits to be manifested within us through the gospel. If His easy conditions are met, He can verify Himself within the sphere of our finite intellect and affections as the Messenger of peace from the bosom of the Father, the Conqueror of death, the mighty Advocate of His people's cause. Can He heal the conscience if He is not the Son of Man who has power on earth to forgive sin? Can He free from the tyranny of self, unless He is God's anointed King? Can He dispel dread and impart the sense of eternal and indwelling life unless by the gift of the Father He has life in Himself? Can He make the human body a temple unless He is so one with the Father that He can reflect His presence, and unless by the mystery of His Incarnation He has come into sensible fellowship with all flesh? His history of humiliation, sacrifice, victory has its gracious counterpart in the experiences of all who trust Him.

It is said that in tropical forests few wild flowers are to be found, because the thick canopy of leaves shuts out the light. Our own English woods would be equally bare of violet and primrose, hyacinth and foxglove, but for the fact that the trees cast their leaves in the winter months and the sunlight can reach the seeds and roots hidden in the earth. In the forests of Guiana, no wind-fertilised

flowers are to be found for a similar reason. The dense foliage shuts out the breezes that elsewhere carry the pollen from one plant to another. And if the fair blooms of peace, joy, love, hope, and assurance are to be found within us and are to sweeten and beautify our lives, if we are to become rich in those qualities which are the crowning glory of an evangelical faith, we must be stripped of our specious pretence and of the vain shows of our self-vaunting righteousness. We all do fade as a leaf, for that is what the prophet's similitude means, and he has no thought whatever of human mortality in his mind. Our pride, our self-exculpations, our zeal to establish our own righteousness, keep the life-giving movements of the Comforter out of our hearts. We must stand out before God in our undissembled sinfulness and then the light of God's face will fall upon us, the sweet breath of His love will come making music in our thoughts, peace will spring up out of the ground and the grace of the lily and the rose adorn our lives.

The seed of righteousness and life has been sown within us by the evangel and will assert its virtues and bear rare fruit, if we accept the conditions and give it the chance. In one of his famous books Charles Darwin tells us that he was once sitting with his children in one of the fields of Surrey, a flock of sheep browsing near by. He set his children to pick out from amongst the grass as many different plants as they could distinguish. In this small stretch of pasturage, they succeeded in finding thirty or forty specimens of British plants and trees. Little oaks that might have become forests were there, cropped short by sheep and oxen : little beeches

that under favourable conditions might have grown into noble avenues, but they were no higher than the surrounding herbage : tiny pines and firs that might have wooded the hillside with their evergreen forms, but were pushed aside by competing growths. The field was a nursery of almost every typical shrub and tree, but the casual observer would have never thought it. And it is thus with the human heart. In its strange soil the highest possibilities of grace and salvation have been sown by unseen hands. The germ of the divine is within us, and under the quickening of the truth is not slow to unfold itself. There is a dwarfed and half-suppressed saintship within every member of the human race, for Jesus Christ draws near with His word to dwell in all willing souls. He who came from above and removed our condemnation, burst the bands of death and went back in His human form to the right hand of God, is essentially present with us by the Spirit. Shall we not make ready the conditions under which Christ will assert Himself, casting out of our souls whatever may stunt or impede the uprising of the seed ?

The law of righteousness and salvation involves two simple conditions—faith, and confession, which is simply faith avowing itself before men. All the powers of the heart must take their part in that faith which we accord to the risen Saviour. There must be no reservation of the reason, no withholding of the affections, no inadequate forthputting of the will. God helps swiftly the faith into which the best powers of the soul enter. The power of faith is within us, or at least we shall find it within us as we struggle. God does not demand what we have not. The

Saviour who came from far-off realms tarries within the range of our spiritual senses and offers Himself moment by moment to our faith. And to this whole-hearted trust there must be joined the confession of the lips. Indeed we do not know how much faith we have till we shape it into a declaration before the world. Some years ago a sagacious nobleman, who was making a speech at a public prize-giving, told the students they could only claim to know those facts which they were able to put down in black and white. In the vague and indeterminate feelings of the heart there may be the beginnings of faith, but we can only claim to sincerely and intelligently believe the things that we define and confess with our lips. Confession reacts upon the faith in which it takes its rise, and confirms and perfects it. These conditions are simpler even than the simple commandment given by Moses. The mighty indwelling presence of Christ will manifest itself within us for salvation, as we believe the word that is in our heart, and confess the good news that is already on our lips.

The fact that the word is so nigh, imposes upon us a solemn responsibility for the fulfilment of these imperative conditions. The message is no dead letter, but is charged with sensitive and intelligent life and always proves its own vindication. The gospel of Jesus calls us back from our aberrations of pride ; it rebukes our shiftlessness and inaction ; and to save us from the hoplessness in which Pharisaism always issues, it brands our very despair as guilt. This word of righteousness, no less than the commandment by Moses, makes ready for judgment. If we fall under the final condemnation this will be

the offence dooming us, that the kingdom came so nigh unto us; that its watchword trembled within our lips and hovered for long upon the very threshold of the heart; but we would not believe and were ashamed to confess our Saviour and King.

XX

THE UNCHANGING SAVIOUR

"Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever."—HEB. xiii. 8.

THE one thought that shines with stedfast light through the pages of this Epistle, the keynote that rules and harmonises its various parts, the pole and pivot on which the suggestive reasoning turns, is the changelessness of Jesus Christ. The opening chapter reminds us of His glorious estate as the great Son of God, who outlasts the fluctuations of the visible universe. The middle chapters assure us that His priestly ministrations are deathless and cannot be devolved upon another. And amidst the exhortations of the closing chapters we are told that as the Friend, the Counsellor, and the Pattern of His followers, in personal character and in the might of His saving dominion, He is the same to all ages without the shadow cast by turning. Such declarations involve the divinity of the Lord Jesus Christ. Of none but the Eternal Jehovah could it be sincerely said that He is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever.

But let us not assume quite so much as that at present. The subject may be approached from the human side, and it is possible to show that Christ's character was so based as to be proof against all

those causes which produce change in human character and friendship. If the doctrine of immortality be granted, we may venture upon the axiom that what Christ once was He must be for ever. And His estate must be as immutable as His character, for the one is the flower of which the other is the supporting root. His exaltation rests upon a moral basis, and He who is unchangeable in character and whose character has touched the highest imaginable standards of perfection, must likewise be unchangeable in office, dignity, and prerogative. It is of His humility and unselfishness the apostle had been thinking when he says, "Wherefore God hath highly exalted Him and given Him a name that is above every name." Through His self-forgetting ministry in the purification of human sin, He hath become "better than the angels, as He hath by inheritance a more excellent name than they."

The character that is *worldly in its ground plan is necessarily fickle.* Those who base their tempers and habits upon an ignorant and infatuated attachment to perishable objects, are bound to pass through changes that can never be foretold. Some men are like the seed which has lodged and begun to unfold itself on a floating island of the sea, rather than upon the slope of a mountain range which will outlast the empires clustered at its feet. The moral life that sends down its root-fibres only to transient and fluctuating things, will necessarily die of inanition before many years have passed. Men are often admirable in many ways, whilst the prosperous environment that has nurtured them continues, full of goodwill, inclined to take the right side in public morals, abounding in kindness of heart and act. But

this superficial benevolence is fostered by influences that are notoriously unstable. These are the saints whom Fortune has made by the magic of her smile, and when Fortune changes their goodness is as the morning dew. Oh, how they deteriorate under reverse! The courtier who has won the hearts of high and low by his pleasing arts, who seemed incapable of an unkind or a disagreeable thing, proves himself one whose hand is against every man, when the butterfly crowd which once accompanied his steps betakes itself elsewhere. The statesman whose patriotism seems clean and unimpeachable shrinks and sours when the acclaim which had stimulated him dies away. His love to party and to fatherland was a mere transaction of barter, and he has nothing to give when there is nothing to be given in exchange. The man who is a conspicuous philanthropist whilst friends rally to his help and the masses applaud, uses the expletives of despots and dictators when he is face to face with a revelation of public ingratitude. Heroism often gives place to pettiness when the world ceases to look on, because it was artificially stimulated to high pulsation and dashing heroism. Character must be unworldly if it is to carry with it the guarantees of permanence and persistent strength. Utilitarian motives may do for a brief spell in the history of a materialistic age, but they can have no currency amongst the immortals.

To those familiar with the records of the evangelists, it needs no argument to show how the character of Jesus Christ was rooted and grounded in such elements that no change could overtake it through all the vicissitudes of His history. In the prime of a healthy manhood He crucified Himself to

the blandishments of the world, and He went on doing so to the very end. His grace and sweetness were not an inconstant perfume of the conservatory, nor did they take their rise in the rich nutritions of a privileged lot. Under crushing woe and tribulation, He diffused through the scenes of selfishness and brutality in which He found Himself, the fragrance of new and unexampled virtues. Had no supernatural factor entered into His character, we might venture to predict that such a character must prove changeless, if it gets the chance. Its roots are everlasting. He borrowed no inspiration from applause. Treachery failed to sour a single utterance that came from His lips, or to shake His faith in the humanity to which He was ministering. When the air was filled with menace and murder, words came from His lips that were as gentle and pitiful as when, three years before, He had been the idol of the wondering multitude, and had spoken for the cleansing of lepers and the healing of the blind. He withdrew from common fame, sometimes forbidding even the report of His wonderful works. He declined a throne. His life and character were grounded on perfect unworldliness, not only to show that He had chosen the nobler part, but to give to all His followers the assurance that no shadow of a perishable motive entered into His thought, and that His unchanging character of purity and love would be worthy of trust so long as sun and moon should endure.

The *discontent that is allied to superficiality* accounts for another strain of fickleness we see in human character. Men change because they have never come to know their own minds. The force of inborn

genius will not infrequently keep a few stedfast to their intellectual aims. Not often do men turn aside from doing that for which they have a strong natural bent or passionate aptitude. We sometimes see a youth taking up fresh subjects of study every month, and dropping them as quickly, and we say his tastes do not lie in that direction; he cannot keep at an art or a science or a language, long enough to get through the drudgery of its first elements, and he will never learn to love it. He has no genius for it, and cannot hope to be more than an inferior, dabbling amateur, and that will not satisfy. History tells us of the mathematician who wanted to finish his problem when the drawn sword was over his head. It was the force of genius which kept the man stedfast under such circumstances, and one feels he would want to occupy himself with the problems of form, even if he were a disembodied spirit. You cannot imagine Tennyson ever leaving off melodious verse-writing, or Carlyle ceasing to paint the lurid tragedies of history, or Turner losing all interest in the lapse of twilight rivers or the pomp of sunsets, or George Eliot throwing down her pen and refusing to make any further attempt to analyse character into its psychological beginnings. A Mozart would divine music in the clatter of a steam forge, and a Tintoret look till he saw colour and beauty in the grim pandemonium of an iron town. The force of a deep, instinctive inspiration will always keep the aim inflexibly resolute.

A field naturalist tells us how interested he was in watching the ways in which bees acted in dealing with a foreign flower, rich in nectar, that had just been introduced into England. The tube of the

flower was too deep and narrow to admit them bodily, neither were they provided by nature with organs of sufficient length to enable them, as they poised themselves on the rim of the flower, to reach the honey glands. For some days, baffled in their quest of the deep-stored sweetness, they wandered restlessly to and fro. At last a sagacious bee hit upon the plan of piercing the flower from the outside, just under the honey gland. The rest learned the lesson, and the puzzled flutter of the insects ceased.

How like to that is many a scene in human life! Men and women fail to reach the true secret of satisfaction, and life is a discontented flight from one gay promise to another. Jesus Christ entered into the deepest springs of content, and was no baffled flutterer like the rest of us. It was His "meat to do the will of the Father and to finish the work He had given" Him to do. He could not change in character because of the sure inward contentment He had reached. Christ's instinct for goodness was so vast and invincible, that it must keep Him true to His first work and to the qualities of His first character for ever. The steadying power of His inward satisfactions counted for more than the force of genius. He had tasted a sweetness that made it impossible for Him to change. In His service of others He had found the grand finality of blessedness. Neither in life nor in death, nor in the after glory, could He be thought of as turning aside from His holy and soul-contenting tasks. Unless He could carry out His redemptive counsels in the presence of the Father, and make His character one unbroken continuity of love, heaven itself would be as midnight to His soul. Christ's vast satisfactions

in His work assure us that whatever He may be in outward estate, in character at least He is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever.

The *new associations into which men pass often modify the disposition* and sensibly affect the character; and that for two reasons. In fresh circles of life they may feel their vanity gratified, and think they can venture to forget the past; and new tastes are sometimes revealed and stimulated by intimacy with new groups of men. For some little souls the acquisition of a few good pictures, a cabinet of old china, and a pair of carriage horses blot out all thought of early companions. Honours and titles prove pleasant narcotics, enabling them to forget the vows and obligations of bygone years. The puffing-up process that sometimes goes on with a rapid advance in position, leaves little room for lowly memories. The natures that are thus changed are small and dwarfed,—natures that have more capacity for the love of things than for the love of persons, in whose innermost fibres there has ever been lurking a vanity that is the seed of death.

But changing associations sometimes alter the mental attitude without bringing actual deterioration of character. *Latent and unrecognised tastes are quickened within men* as they pass into new circles of life. Till they have felt the influence of some new set of scholars or thinkers they do not come to discover their own talents. The ruling ideas of a novel environment will expand and thrust into view layers of sensibility that have been repressed and overlain by the old. He who has no strain of faithlessness or ingratitude in his nature, sometimes seeks new

friendships, since the unfolding of his mental life has brought aptitudes into the open which demand kindred qualities for converse. Old circles lose something of their charm because of the new world into which a man is pushed by the insistent soul-growth within him. Human nature changes, for it encounters new conditions in its unresting orbit.

The humility of Jesus Christ is a sufficient guarantee of the enduring qualities of His friendship and sympathy. He emptied Himself of His glory, and through each succeeding stage of life went on emptying Himself. Most willingly did He go to His death of redemptive ignominy. Pride had no chance in such a soul. He loved persons first, and things in a second degree—loved for love's sake, and could not change. Nothing could spoil His simplicity or weaken His faithfulness towards those whom He loved to the end, and still loves. When the cloud received Him out of His disciple's sight He was in the act of blessing, and the act is continued in heaven. The interests of that world into which He has passed cannot divert His thought from His earthly followers. Whilst He was yet in the flesh His nature was touched on all sides by the powers of the world to come. The influences of the vast future were playing upon Him. The very angels of God were ascending and descending upon the Son of Man. By a strange sky-cleaving consciousness He was ever in heaven. He could catch the accent of His Father's approving word, and His coming exaltation concerned His Church more closely than Himself. He had something more than the faith which is the evidence of things not seen. His character could not change, because the forces of the

coming eternity were already besetting Him behind and before with their urgent contact.

We sometimes change with changing associations, and seem to waver in our fidelity to the past, because *Nature herself has put bounds to our power for fellowship.* We are driven to a strict economy of thought and feeling, and new absorbing interests debar us from entering with the same zest into the old. As the horizon widens our sympathy is apt to lose its first intenseness. Some of us perhaps know what it is to shed, by a kind and painless process, friends and comrades from whom we have been drifted by circumstances, the correspondents of our leisured youth, because life is too short and work too pressing for the little attentions and remembrances that would otherwise be fitting. The military authorities who are trying to train carrier pigeons as messengers in the event of war, do not expect such service from tiny humming-birds, whose life is spent in flitting from flower to flower. The mechanism of flight can only carry these little specks of emerald and crimson and saffron over a few square yards of the forest at most. And we do not blame ourselves for the inability to pass from circle to circle in life, and bear ourselves with sympathy and active helpfulness towards all those with whom we may have been linked in past periods of our history. The springs of sentiment, imagination, and nervous life that are within us are too scanty for these wider ranges of active friendship. Without any shrivelling of the heart into selfishness, we sometimes find ourselves compelled to contract and circumscribe our relationships. It may be, that nature has given to our thought and sympathy and power of active

helpfulness quite as wide a field as our cramped characters will enable us profitably to use. We sometimes seem to change through inherent limitation and infirmity, not because we are fickle at heart towards those to whom we were so near in the past.

The love of Jesus Christ was infinite in the days of His weakness, and no task of friendship was left undone. His far-reaching sympathies enlisted on their side the exhaustlessness and the plenitude of Divine attributes, and the flesh in which they were enshrined transcended all common limits. The inner forces of the character prevailed over weariness, vexation, death. Now at last the flesh itself has been glorified, and the imprisonment of its powers is at an end. Is not the character the flesh once enshrined, unchangeable in its holy forces and benign attachments?

But an argument from the stable qualities of character to be found in Jesus Christ does not go far enough, and will scarcely land us in the high persuasion with which the writer of this Epistle comforted the hearts of his readers. Of human character in some of its highest types and developments it is perhaps possible to prove almost as much. In the case of Jesus Christ, however, this truth avails not only to warrant our faith in the Redeemer's abiding goodwill to each member of the race, but assures us likewise of His eternal power and dominion. His present exaltation rests not so much upon His essential community of nature with the Father, although that may have made it possible, but upon the moral quality of His great life-work. His is the only reign that has entitled itself to be eternal. If Christ were only human and nothing

more, we should feel that a God caring for the moral welfare of the universe could not suffer such a perfect type of tenderness and fidelity to perish. That would be an infinite disaster, an ineradicable blot upon the universe, a wrong to every realm of rational life. Such excellence must become immortal, if it is not inherently so. The Eternal must lift it to His own right hand. All the moral qualities of God undergird and stay up His throne, and the throne is as strong as its foundations and cannot perish. If the character is unchangeable, the new life of power and ministry springing up out of it must be unchanging likewise. Unless the holy and constant friend of humankind can cease to be all that He was in His state of humiliation upon earth, the sceptre cannot fall from His grasp, and the influence He radiates through the universe must be imperishable. "The same yesterday, to-day, and for ever." There is some kind of correlation between imperfection and mortality, but none whatever between the unutterable excellence of Jesus Christ and that dark land of forgetfulness where God can neither be praised nor man ministered unto. Whatever may be the destiny reserved for ourselves, we feel that if the universe has a Ruler He would be finally discredited were He to suffer such an one as Jesus of Nazareth to fall short of active and influential immortality.

The opening sentences of this Epistle put *the brevities and fluctuations of the physical universe into contrast with Christ's unchanging life.* We scarcely need an inspired book to remind us of those laws of change which are written alike upon the earth and the firmament that overarches it. No

wonder that Oriental mystics have come to look upon the things that address our senses as shows and phantasms, for we are never permitted to forget their transiency. Oh, how the face of the world has changed, and will still change! Life is but a thin green strip that unites two unexplored deserts; that which lies behind is silence, and that which lies before is death. Plants and trees, birds and four-footed beasts are as migratory as gipsies, shifting their camping ground as often as the need arises. At the time when the flint arrow-heads to be seen in the British Museum were shaped, the elk, the rhinoceros, and the woolly elephant abounded in the valley of the Thames. The law of change is more far-reaching still. Planets which are our next-door neighbours, perchance once supported life and then relapsed into sterility. The solid stars are but shadows, and could we watch them long enough, they would vanish like the shadows which lie for a few brief hours across our streets. The suns in the vault of heaven are bubbles of gas on those mystic and unmeasured tides of force which flow through space, and were our life less ephemeral we should see them collapse and pass away. I do not know why this sacred writer should introduce into an epistle designed more especially to interpret the principles of Jewish ritual, these references to the passing away of the heavens and the earth, unless indeed he looked upon the visible universe as a larger Judaism, a system of symbols, object-lessons destined to fade. In comparison with the fleeting phenomena which environ us, Christ is the enduring substance, the reality which persists unchanged through all change.

They shall perish, but Thou remainest."

In the midchapters of the Epistle the writer contrasts the virtue of Christ's sacrifice with *the oft-repeated and ineffectual sacrifices of the tabernacle*, and puts the power of His priesthood as an antithesis to the changes enforced by death upon those who in ancient days filled office for a little time. Whilst conceding the Divine authority of those ideas which had moulded the faith and worship of the Jews, the writer at the same time describes the system as a mere arrangement of shadows. The propitiatory quality in the sacrifice, was as shortlived as the sweetness of a flower that blooms in a handbreadth of time, and the sacrifice had to be daily repeated. One might almost as well expect to disperse the plague ravaging a continent by a brazier of burning sandalwood as deal with the portentous fact of sin as men in every part of the world had been dealing with it by their small mocking oblations. The limited scope of priestly ministration was pathetically illustrated on Mount Hor, when Aaron was stripped of his official raiment and his son invested in his stead. There was no permanence in the prerogative. The wisdom, sympathy, spiritual help which characterised the tenure of office by one man were ever passing away, and giving place to the untried qualities of his successor. Imperfection was the bar to enduring and deathless service. If priest, sacrifice, and mediation had possessed moral completeness they would never have been changed. The Old Covenant ministry was full of blemish, and could not be other than changing. But such was the sufficiency and perfection of the sacrifice presented on the cross, that it could be neither rivalled nor approached. There could no more be a duplicate of it than there

could be two infinites in the same universe. It was divine in its virtues, and to supersede it by anything else would be the abdication, yea even the suicide, of God. The deathless glory which has come to Him is His alike by the equities of natural and moral inheritance. Jesus Christ stands outside the economy of fugitive shadows. Not once a year does He enter into a sanctuary made with hands and uplift on our behalf a voice tremulous with awe. "He ever liveth to make intercession for us." Every day of His endless life is an atonement-day, and His voice of intercession never falters through mortal faintness, but has in it the accent of eternity. When the last flower shall have gone, and the last sun have rushed into darkness, and worlds shall shudder with the omens of coming change, this sacrifice shall continue to be a sweet-smelling savour of love to God.

So penetrated indeed is this writer with thoughts of the changelessness of Jesus Christ, that *the subject irresistibly returns upon Him in the midst of the fragmentary exhortations which close the Epistle.* The tragic calamities which had engulfed the first teachers of these Hebrew saints, is a gloomy background throwing into resplendent prominence the figure of this stedfast, deathless Friend and King. The ranks of the early disciples had been sadly thinned by violence and wild-beast rage. Indeed the tense into which the writer puts his words seems to imply that: "Remember them which *had* the rule over you, which spake unto you the word of God." The saintly and skilful Stephen, with soul hot and pure as an altar fire, still lived in the memory of a few. Others might have listened to James the apostle,

one of the chosen three, years since slain by the sword of Herod. And Peter, another of the group whom they had heard, may have already shared his Master's baptism, crucified with a new accession of cruelty and shame. The overthrow of Jerusalem was looming in the near future. Viewed in its earthly incidents and surroundings, the dispensation under which they were living did not rest upon very stable guarantees, whatever may have been the permanence of its hidden principles. The writer has spoken of a kingdom that could not be moved, and yet that kingdom seemed to rest upon a more precarious foundation than moribund Judaism itself. Impending revolutions of portentous magnitude beset the Church on every side. It had by no means escaped the change and violence which had been rife for a generation. And yet there were certainties in the midst of these mutations, unassailable rock at the very heart of the reeling storm. The hunted apostles, the harassed confessors, the pale, bleeding witnesses of the kingdom, had as "the issue of their conversation," the unchanging Friend. Their faith maintained itself in strength because it was grappled to a stedfast help, a living presence of tenderness that never withdrew itself. And in their terrible torture and dying, Jesus was not less real to them than when He had talked softly on mountain-top, by lake-side, or amidst the rustling corn ; nor was His sympathy less sweet, sensible, soul-healing. They dared death so that they might know His nearer presence beyond the grave. He was now no less the perfecter of their faith, than He had been its leader, when He distilled the rich music of His beatitudes and absolutions upon their entranced

ears, or wrought miracles of love before their adoring eyes.

The context suggests *a contrast between the unchanging Christ and the departing generation of Christian teachers.* The Lord of the servants abides when the servants themselves vanish from the scenes of their toil. At the date when this Epistle was written, perhaps John was the only survivor of Christ's immediate companions and contemporaries. Timid souls might think that the faith itself would be stripped of its chief defences when the last of the apostles had passed away. Possibly they were the subjects of the despondent pensiveness we often feel when the great leaders of our century are removed by death. We ask in our bewilderment, "Who is to take the helm and guide us through the critical times that are at hand? The spirit of change is in the air, and great revolutions are coming to the birth." As we ask these questions we scarcely realise the dismay with which they would be asked in the closing decades of the first century, when the last eye-witness of the work of Jesus Christ, and the last possessor of miraculous gift was about to pass away. It seemed as though the pillars of the Church were falling from their places, and the Church itself were threatened. The last apostle could not tarry much longer, and Christ Himself had not come. Who will guide us through these days of trouble, and who inspirit us with strength and courage in the crisis of our weakness? Yet these changes could not be fraught with the fatal results sometimes feared. The changeless Christ would remain the central figure in the midst of the Church, the Priest, the Advocate, the Helper of His people, a source of light that could suffer no eclipse.

Some traveller of the Norman times is passing along an old English valley as the night begins to deepen. On the hillside facing him groups of peasants are returning from their fields, and they have kindled torches to frighten away the wolves. Through the open doors of the distant hamlet the faint glow of fire comes, and dim tapers flicker in the casements. By and by the valley becomes one long unbroken shadow. And now at last the curfew sounds from the lowly church on the hill. The peasants have reached their homes, the lights in the casements are quenched, and the scattered habitations are shrouded in darkness. In the clear sky behind the shoulder of the hill a star shines which obeys no sound of curfew. It glittered over the triremes of the Romans as they crossed to Britain's shores. It will hang undimmed over the grave of the youngest child cradled in the hamlet, and will watch the long procession of Normans, Plantagenets, Tudors, Stuarts, to their last resting-places.

And is it not thus with One who is described as the Bright and Morning Star? Prophet, apostle, or evangelist hold out to the dark and erring world the light of life, and by and by the solemn curfew sounds across the heavens, and the light in which we were "willing to walk for a season" has passed from our pathway. The apostles are gone. The reformers have long since followed in their steps. The evangelists of the last century, of imperishable work and memory, do they live for ever? The twilight knell is heard again, and the men who were the lights and guides of our spiritual childhood are no longer with us. But the Lord of the Church abides when His servants vanish; and from His

celestial enthronement an unchanged Christ looks down upon each succeeding generation of men, to guide their feet into the way of peace.

Jesus Christ is here spoken of as *the source of stedfastness to His people.* "Be not carried about with divers and strange doctrines, for it is a good thing that the heart be established with grace." We sometimes speak as though stedfastness were a natural gift, rather than a fruit of our fellowship with the Saviour and pattern of His people. Whilst temperament may help or hinder in the attainment of this grace, it is none the less a fact that we can only become stedfast and established as we see and know that He changes not. All fickleness is bred of those hesitations which so often invalidate our faith, and such hesitations are caused by the caprices of our ill-ruled thought. If we knew Him in His enduring grace and helpfulness, we should be as superior to change as the eagle soaring sunwards in the untroubled ether, is proof against the tremors of the earthquake or the vibration of the waves breaking upon the rock-bound shores. How many of us are the sport of overpowering distractions, and make as poor a show of it as the butterfly fluttering in the teeth of a cyclone! By more intimate converse with Jesus Christ, we may be enabled to pursue a course from which we shall never swerve a handbreadth. The groups of asteroids that have cast in their lot with bodies greater than themselves, are able to follow fixed orbits in the midst of forces against which they would otherwise be powerless. And so will it be with us, if for life and death we throw in our lot with the changeless Christ. The immutable Master will make stedfast disciples.

Let us learn the lesson of these golden words. Whatever Jesus Christ has been to any soul of man in the past generations, that He is to you and to me to-day. You could have been made sure of forgiveness from His lips, if you had watched Him as in strange tenderness and pity He hung upon the cross; but He is just as easy to be intreated now. You think He once made hearts glad with a more blessed sunshine than that which lights up your poor pale experience; but the change is in you, and not in Him. The dwellers in some Alpine hamlet just beneath the snow-line hear in the midnight a sound as of muffled thunder and shudder with a sudden sense of cold. An avalanche of snow has entombed them, and when the time comes round for morning to break, they are in darkness like that of the grave. Unless swift rescue is at hand, the imprisonment will by and by bring blindness, and perchance death itself. But the darkness lies only upon this handful of ill-fated homes, and outside there are floods of sunshine and the singing of the birds, the stately splendour of the pine-woods, and the clear sapphire of lake and sky. And we sometimes plant our habitations so near the world and its evil unbeliefs that disastrous darkness sweeps upon us and we think that the Lord has forsaken us, and that His mercy is clean gone for ever. But the Sheol is an imprisoning film about us and not about the person of Him who is the Light of the world. Within our touch, if we would only shake off our paralysing torpor and thrust out the hand of faith, there are realms of sunshine and worlds filled with the songs of the ransomed and the breath of glad benedictions.

And taking our stand on these words, may we not say that all Jesus can and will be in the future He is even now, and that His presence is the earnest of the glorious things laid up in the after-ages for them that love God. In the far-off destinies to which we are moving, Jesus Christ will be more to us, not because He will have changed either in Himself or in His relationship of love to us, but because we shall have grown. It sometimes takes us fifty years to discover the worth and innermost character of those who were the guardians of our thoughtless childhood; and it will take many ages for Christ to be adequately discovered to us. And yet the coming eternities cannot enrich the love, deepen the sympathy, or increase the helpfulness of Him who shares His Father's life, and is "the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever."

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